

Scores of deaths, many missing as floods continue to ravage KP

- 310 confirmed dead in province; over 100 bodies recovered
- Buner worst-affected with 204 deaths; PDMA fears more fatalities
- Emergency declared in nine districts until Aug 31; NDMA urges curbs on tourism
- KP observes day of mourning

By Mohammad Ashfaq

PESHAWAR: As the death toll from catastrophic cloudburst-triggered flooding in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa neared to 310 on Saturday, with Buner district alone accounting for 204 fatalities, recovery efforts continue amid fears of rising casualties, with a state of emergency declared in nine districts.

Torrential rains have ravaged homes, displaced families, and left a trail of destruction across Buner, Swat, Shangla, Mansehra, and beyond, with authorities warning that dozens of victims may still be trapped under debris.

"At least 93 bodies have been recovered in Buner, the worst-affected district," Anwar Shahzad, spokesman for the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), told Dawn on Saturday.

He feared that the figure might climb further as recovery operations continue over the next few days, with dozens of people still trapped under mud and large

boulders.

In an advisory, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) said public movement in high-risk areas must be curtailed

'Intense' monsoon spell from today: Page 3

PTI shelves politics for now to aid flood victims: Page 3

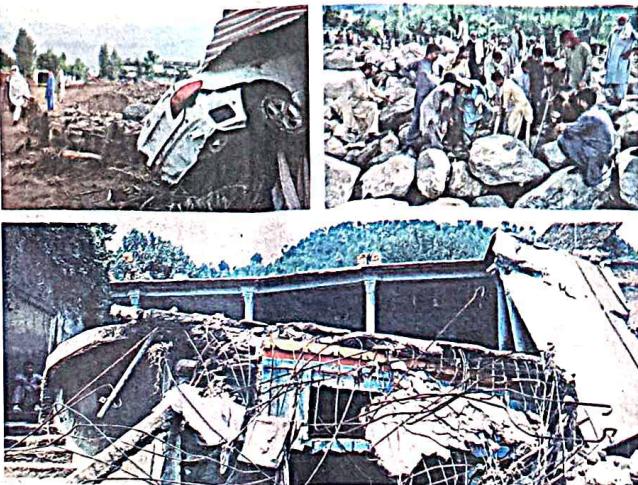
Villagers throng Neelum Dam to collect timber after floods: Page 3

Flash floods ruin infrastructure in Gilgit-Baltistan: Page 3

Condolences pour in from world over after deadly KF floods: Page 5

during active monsoon spells to safeguard lives and support emergency response efforts. The advisory also notes that Section 144 may be enforced, if necessary, to

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THESE three pictures capture the horror and misery inflicted by heavy rains and floods upon Buner. (Clockwise) A woman walks past a battered vehicle; residents remove rocks in front of their houses; and a man sits next to a damaged house.—Reuters

Mass funeral amid rubble and grief in Buner

By Manzoor Ali in Buner

AT BATAI, a couple of kilometres upstream of Pir Baba Bazaar in Buner, hundreds of mourners gathered on a rocky bank of the Pachay stream under the blazing Sun. Saturday morning sun to offer a mass funeral for more than 40 people who had perished in the devastating floods a day earlier.

Locals from a nearby village group, set up on flood-littered cornfields now covered with a thick layer of alluvial deposits left in the deluge's wake. The bodies were laid in two rows, with some cots carrying two corpses, blood stains still visible on the shrouds. Villagers jostled

to get a final glimpse as elders tried to restrain mobile-wielding youths. Suddenly, the restless calm was broken by a group of wailing women arriving to say goodbye to their relatives. "Stop filming, stop filming."

Unprepared nation: Editorial on Page 6

some among the crowd shouted, while others muttered, "What are they doing here? They should not be here."

Jahan Bar, a bulky local elder, addressed the mourners, urging them not to return home after the burial. "Our family members and friends'

Continued on Page 5

SJC rejects PTI pleas against CEC, ECP members

SC announces new policies on judges' leave, foreign travel, vehicle use, and security

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), in its meetings, had dismissed a reference moved by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) against the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja, and members of the Election Commission, including ECP members.

In an announcement, SJC explained that in its meetings held on Nov 8, 2024 and Dec 13, 2024, the council had taken

up the reference moved by the PTI against CEC and others Nisar Ahmed Durrani and Shah Mahmood Jarai but rejected it after due consideration.

The announcement, made through a press release, stated that pursuant to the SJC's decision, the decision be made public and placed on the official website of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. "Complaint No. 532/2021/SJC/5372023/SJ/2024/2024/C/CEC" against CEC and members of the ECP.

In its reference, PTI alleged that the CEC and ECP members had failed to fulfil their constitutional responsibility of conducting free and fair elections.

The reference, filed on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly and PTI Secretary General Usman Aziz, argued that ECP had deliberately violated its constitutional obligation under Article 224 by

failing to hold elections to the National Assembly and provincial assemblies of Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) on time.

The PTI pleaded for an inquiry into the alleged misconduct of the CEC and ECP members, arguing they should be

Imran files additional grounds in ball plea: Page 5

removed from their offices if the charges were substantiated.

The reference had alleged that the commission failed to conduct elections in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the National Assembly within the constitutionally mandated 90-day period.

SC policy decisions

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court also

issued a number of policy decisions taken between Oct 26, 2024 and Aug 12, 2025. One such decision, reflected in the Supreme Court Order dated July 29, 2025, amended the Supreme Court Judges (Leave, Pension and Privileges) Order, 1997, empowering the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) to grant or refuse leave, whether within or outside Pakistan, or to revoke or curtail leave already granted to judges of the court.

As a matter of settled principle, the entire time of a judge is at the disposal of the State/Supreme Court — including leave, vacations, and holidays — therefore, it is essential to regulate the powers of the CJP through a Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs), to be exercised with due diligence and in the

SC policy decisions.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court also

No change in national leadership, says COAS

Dawn Report

KARACHI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Field Marshal Asim Munir has personally dismissed speculation about changes in the presidency and premiership as the work of elements conspiring against the ruling setup, in remarks quoted on Saturday by a local newspaper.

Field Marshal Munir had stopped over in Brussels on his return from last week's visit to the United States and spoken to Suhail Warrack, senior editor for the *Daily Jang* newspaper, on the matter, according to *Dawn Report*.

"The talk started with politics, especially on rumours that there is some effort to change the president of Pakistan as well as the prime minister. Field Marshal Munir clearly said to me in the Brussels gathering and in his two-hour discussion with me, that the rumours about a change were completely false," the column said.

Warrack informed that this "rumour" had been circulated by both political and military agencies, he [Field Marshal Munir] said this could not be possible. "In fact, there are elements behind this who

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Dar lands in UK for three-day official visit

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar landed in the United Kingdom on Saturday for a three-day official visit aimed at strengthening bilateral relations and enhancing collaboration in digital technology and artificial intelligence, the Foreign Office said.

Mr Dar is scheduled to hold talks with high-level officials, including UK Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Pakistan Hamish Falconer and Commonwealth Secretary-General Sir Ronald Aspinwall Botwright.

During his trip, Mr Dar will engage with British members of Parliament, Kashmiri leaders and representatives of the Pakistani diaspora.

He is also set to inaugurate a pilot project by the Punjab Land Record Authority and One Window Operation by DMPASS at the Pakistan High Commission in London.—APP



New regime spurs vehicle imports

The import of used vehicles jumped by nearly 41 per cent in the second half of FY25 following the introduction of faceless customs clearance, though revenue growth remained marginal. Between Dec 16, 2024 and June 30, 2025, a 25,347 vehicles were imported under the new system compared to 17,695 units cleared during June 1 to Dec 15, 2024, under the old regime.

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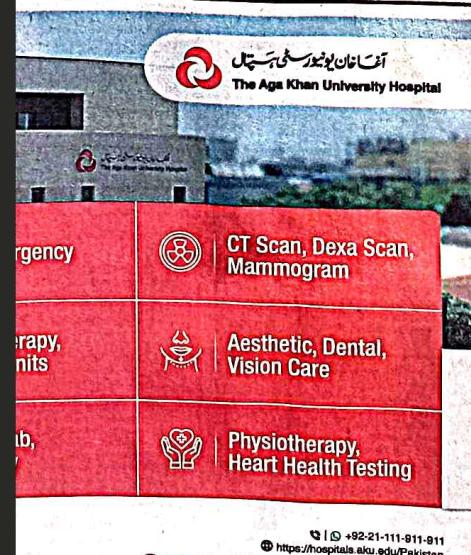
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By Numan Khan

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Rs600m for veterinary internship programme

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: The Punjab government has allocated a sum of Rs600m for the veterinary internship programme in the province.

Under the Chief Minister Internship

Programme, veterinary graduates will get a monthly stipend of Rs60,000, while para-vets/livestock assistants will receive Rs40,000 per month during internship.

Veterinary graduates with the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) degree recognised by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) can apply for the programme in their respective districts.

According to the government, those who have completed a two-year LAD course can also apply for internship in their respective districts.

Veterinary graduates and para-vets can apply from home via link: www.jobs.punjab.gov.pk. Quota for the veterinary assistants, AI-technicians and lab assistants in 36 districts of Punjab has been fixed.

"Livestock farmers will get animal treatment and consultation facilities at their doorsteps through this initiative. Its aim is to promote and develop livestock in Punjab. It will not only provide practical experience to youth in the field but will also provide them with a monthly stipend," it said.



LAHORE: Sahul-on-the-go bazaar shops being constructed at Gulshan-i-Ravi. — White Star

Gogi Butt's bail in Truckanwala case extended

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: A sessions court on Saturday extended the interim pre-arrest bail of Khwaja Aqeel Ahmed alias Gogi Butt in the murder case of Amer Balal Tippu, a son of Lahore's underworld don late Afzil Amer alias Tipu Truckanwala.

On expiry of his bail period, Gogi Butt appeared before the court with a request to extend his bail.

A duty judge heard the petition of Butt and extended the bail till Sept 1.

The judge directed the petitioner to join the investigation and also instructed the police to present the record of the case at the next hearing.

The judge also extended the bail of Gogi Butt in another case registered under the Prevention of Cybercrime Act for hurling life threats at police officials.

Chung police had registered the murder case against Gogi Butt and others.

Three bikers die on road

LAHORE: Three motorcyclists were killed when a speedy tractor trolley ran over them in Kahn on Saturday morning.

Arsheed (40), and his cousins Faisal and Umer were going from Ferozepur Road to Hali Road on a motorcycle when a speeding tractor trolley hit them. The motorcyclists died on the spot while the driver fled the scene.

Kahn police registered a case against the unidentified driver and started investigation.

FOUND DEAD: Bodies of two teenage boys were recovered under a garbage pile near Hadayita crossing Defence Road on Saturday.

Rescue 1122 received a call on Friday evening that two teenage boys Atzal Umer and Abdulkarim, both aged 15 years, were trapped under the debris of waste. The rescue teams reached the spot and started a search operation.

After seven hours of searching, rescue teams found both bodies under the garbage pile. Police investigation revealed that the boys were scavenging for empty bottles when the garbage pile suddenly collapsed on them. The bodies were handed over to the families after completing legal formalities. — Staff Reporter

One killed as train hits car

NAROWAL: The Sialkot Express hit a car on the tracks of the Sahuwala canal, killing its driver and injuring a passenger on Saturday.

The train was travelling from Wazirabad via Sialkot/Narowal to Lahore.

The train was hit by the train passing through the canal track near the Sahuwala Patrolling Police Post.

A Rescue 1122 team arrived at the scene and found the car driver, Mushtaq Masih (45), was killed on the spot. Parvez on the passenger seat was injured in the incident.

The rescue team handed over the dead body of the victim to the police.

Eyewitnesses said the car was crossing the canal through the railway track. The train pushed the car and took it to the middle of the canal on the track while stopping in between.

Parvez who was on the passenger seat, jumped out of the car before the train hit it. The track was cleared after a two-hour long struggle and the Sialkot Express left for its destination. — Correspondent

Sugar shortage persists as admin fails to streamline supply

Retailers have their own stories to tell; DC rubbishes reports about scarcity

By Khalid Hasnain

LAHORE: As the shortage of sugar at most retail shops continues in various localities, the local authorities seem to have no viable plan to ensure smooth supply of the commodity for the purchasing public.

On the other hand, the situation has forced the people to either buy sugar on high rates from the local shops or search some major departmental/chain-stores for getting it on the notified DC rate (Rs173 per kg).

According to another Johar Town's resident (near Aqab Chowk), most retail shops in his area don't have sugar due to which the people are forced to purchase it on high rates from others. "A shopkeeper secretly gave me sugar at the rate of Rs186 per kg but I got it for Rs165 per kg from the wholesale market," he added.

Likewise Johar Town - the city's one of the major residential and commercial areas - the shortage of the sweetener still persists at Mohallah shops situated reportedly in Mughalpura, Kothi Pir, Abdul Rehman, Rohemannur, Daro, Dera, Township, Samanshahi, Islampura, Sanda etc.

Dawn has learnt:

"None of the grocery shops in our area has sugar for the last many days. And I finally got it (only two kg) at a major mall's grocery store at the rate of Rs173 per kg," commented a resident of J-Block (Johar Town).

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in Mughalpura, Kothi Pir, Abdul Rehman, Rohemannur, Daro, Dera, Township, Samanshahi, Islampura, Sanda etc.

"We have finally decided not to procure sugar from the wholesale market, since it costs us much more than the price fixed by the city administration. We have decided to go to heavy fines being imposed on us by government unlawfully," said a shopkeeper while talking to Dawn on Saturday.

According to him, a 50kg sugar bag is being sold in the market at Rs186 per kg.

And when we receive it after paying transportation charges, it costs for Rs186. "But when we sell it to the people at Rs190 per kilo, the government not only captures us but also imposes heavy fines besides registering

cases. So it is better not to sell sugar," he argued.

He said that he has heard that some major stores are selling the commodity at the rate of Rs173 per kg, he said in fact, they have huge stocks for long.

"A Mohallah shop owner purchases a couple of sugar bags whereas these stores procure in bulk (thousands of bags) and sell at a rate which is lower than a shopkeeper," he said, requesting the government to better penalise the hoarders instead of capturing the shopkeepers.

According to him, a 50kg sugar bag is being sold in the market at Rs186 per kg.

Commissioner Syed Mustafa Raza dispelled the impression and termed the shopkeepers' stance baseless. "In last few days we have ensured supply of over 6,000 metric tonnes of sugar in the wholesale markets at the

rate of Rs167 per kg. The ex-mill price is Rs165 per kg. So how can someone buy sugar from the wholesale market for Rs184 per kg," he wondered.

He said the "mafia" is trying hard to defeat the government by creating artificial shortage of sugar. According to him, the mill owners are not ready to sell sugar at the notified government notified rates (Rs165 per kg). But the government has tightened all of them to follow the rates. "I am confident to say that 90 to 95 per cent of Lahore has no shortage of sugar. And there may be some hoarders who are creating artificial shortage in a bid to make a quick buck," DC Raza claimed, adding that if shopkeepers are getting sugar bag at Rs9,200, they must contact his office with immediate effect.

Vehari, Lodhran put on high alert following flood warning

India expected to release water into Sutlej causing flooding

By Our Correspondent

BAHAWALPUR: Vehari and Lodhran districts have been put on high alert due to incoming flood warnings by the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA).

Following reports of possible rise in the water levels of river Sutlej as India could release water into the Sutlej, the district administrations of Vehari and Lodhran swung into action. Field staff was deployed to supervise the distribution process if need arose, she added.

She said the Rescue 1122

had ample life-saving equipment, including boats and life jackets.

The ADC requested the

DC to inspect the

area of camps and checked

the stocks of medicines and

other material. She also

directed to immediately remove encroachments along the banks of the river.

On the occasion, the dis-

trict heads of Rescue 1122,

irrigation, revenue, health and livestock departments gave a detailed briefing to the DC regarding the arrangements.

In Vehari district, flood relief camp had been set up at the primary school built by the DC. She said that the population around the camps had been told to immediately shift to the relief camps in case of an emergency.

She said the camps were equipped with necessary medicines and foodstuff. The revenue field staff was deputed to supervise the distribution process if need arose, she added.

She said the Rescue 1122 had ample life-saving equipment, including boats and life jackets.

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He said that the population around the camps had been told to immediately shift to the relief camps in case of an emergency.

He asked the officials of health and livestock departments to stay alert to any emergency situations.

The ADC also asked the officials to alert the adjacent population and be ready to move to the relief camps along with their cattle in case of an emergency.

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Sarmad joins Saba Karim Khan for Dealing in Desire

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: Acclaimed actor and director Sarmad Sultan Khan joins forces with author and documentary filmmaker Saba Karim Khan for an experimental short film, *Dealing in Desire*, says a press release.

The project draws inspiration from Saba's poem of the same name, originally published in UK, and from Saadat Hasan Manto's celebrated short story, *Hatok* (The Insult). Starring Rasti Farooq, *Dealing in Desire* probes themes often kept to whispers: the power dynamics between men and women, the emotional cost of exploitation and the journey towards reclaiming agency while navigating systemic marginalisation.

Through an interplay of postmodern verse and visual storytelling, the film seeks to disrupt conventional narratives and invite audiences into an intimate, provocative space.

Speaking about the collaboration, Saba Karim Khan shared: "As a storyteller, I've always been curious about how stories can transmit from paper to screen — in this case, exploring the cinematic quality of

postmodern verse. *Dealing in Desire* delves into women's desire and morality, reclaiming agency when you belong to a deliberately silenced category in society. I can't imagine a better collaboration than Sarmad, whose artistic sensitivity reveals uncomfortable truths without overestimating his audiences. I hope this work pushes the needle for storytelling from Pakistan, inspiring more experimental short-form cinema."

Sarmad reflected on adapting Saba's work: "Words can be more incisive than visualising than pictures, though I understand this may not be universally true. Saba's poignant and abstract piece sparked a multitude of visual and sonic possibilities. As always, Manto Sahab came to my rescue, with Hatak lending its beautiful chaos to harness the narrative."

While the short film can be challenging, it also offers liberation. I'm nervous, yet curious, about how the seers and listeners will perceive it."

With its fusion of poetic prose, literary homages and cinematic experimentation, *Dealing in Desire* aims to broaden the canvas for independent filmmaking in Pakistan, challenging how stories of desire, morality, and agency are told.

Tarar's brother gets PML-N ticket for NA-66

By Zulqernain Tahir

LAHORE: PML-N President Mian Shahbaz Sharif on Saturday awarded NA-66 (Wazirabad) by poll ticket to Federal Information Minister Attaullah Tarar's brother Bila Farooq, ignoring the party candidate, who had secured over 100,000 votes in the constituency in the last election.

Opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's 12 lawmakers were disqualified in Punjab by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) following their conviction in the May 9 (2023) cases. The disqualified lawmakers hailed from eight National Assembly and four Punjab Assembly constituencies.

In 2024 to oblige information minister's brother, Tahir Dawn, he was

asked to give the same ticket to his brother.

He said that his brother had also got an offer to secure victory through Form-47 but he declined. "This was leadership which got an offer," he said.

Atta Tarar thanked the party leadership for awarding the party ticket to his brother saying "we are thankful to our leaders

Mawaz Sharif and Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif."

For NA-129, the elder Sharif is yet to finalise party candidate.

The party insider believes that there has been a tussle between the brothers, Nauman and Rana Masood, and that Nauman and Masood are reportedly close to Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz and PM Shehbaz Sharif.

On the other hand, the PTI is giving its second ticket to Imran Khan for NA-129, Mian Azhar's son Hammad Azhar is likely to be party's candidate.

"Though PTI patron-in-chief Imran Khan has barred the party from contesting the by-poll, some leaders are of the view that the PML-N govern-

ment should not be given open field to gain these seats," a PTI leader told Dawn.

He said Mr Khan would be conveyed the sentiment within the party and it was likely that he might change his mind.

Earlier, Mr Khan had said the party would not field candidates to show solidarity with disqualified members who stood firm with the party despite extreme challenges. "The party will completely boycott the the vote," Imran Khan had said in a recent statement.

When asked about PTI's possible boycott, PML-N Punjab President and PML-N Punjab Secretary General Rana Sanaullah told Dawn that the PML-N had information that the Khan's party was not boycotting the by-poll.



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'Intense' monsoon spell from today

- Met Office warns of flash floods, mudslides
- Punjab PDMA issues 'red alert' for multiple districts
- Tarbela Dam is 98pc full; India releases more water

By Aamir Yasin and Imran Gabol

RAWALPINDI/AHORE: The authorities have been asked to remain on their toes amid a fresh spell of monsoon rains, which is expected in Barkhan, Musakhel, Loralai, Sibi, Zhob, Qilla Saifullah, Khuzdar, Lasbela, Awaran, Keoch, Gwadar, and Panjgur from August 17 to 21, while the country along with thunderstorms.

The new spell coincides with a warning of heavy flooding in Punjab's rivers due to an increase in water level on the back of the heavy monsoon rains and glacial melt in the northern parts of the country, particularly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where over 200 people had died in a single day.

The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PAID) said widespread rain/wind/thunderstorms (with scattered heavy falls at times very heavy) is expected in Kasmir (Neelum Valley), Muzaffarabad, Rawalakot, Poonch, Hayman, Bagh, Haveli, Sudhanpur, Kotli, Bhimber, Dina, Gilgit-Baltistan (Diamer, Astor, Ghizer, Skardu, Hunza, Gilgit, Ghanche, Shigar) from August 17 to 19 with occasional gaps.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, widespread rain/thunderstorms (with scattered heavy falls at times very heavy) is expected in Dir, Chitral, Swat, Kohistan, Shangla, Battagram, Charsadda, Buner, Mohmand, Kohat, Peshawar, Chaudhara, Nowshera, Mardan, Swabi, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, Hangu, Karak, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Waziristan, Tank, and Dera Ismail Khan from August 17 to 19.

In Punjab, widespread rain/wind/thunderstorms (with scattered heavy falls at times very heavy) is expected in Gujrat, Jhelum, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Multan, Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar, Rajapur, and Rahim Yar Khan from August 18 to 20.

In Sindh, rain/wind/thunderstorms (with scattered heavy falls at times very heavy) are expected in Tharparkar, Umer Kot, Mirpurkhas, Hyderabad, Shabqoh, Sajawal, Tando Aliyar, Tando Muhammad Khan, Sanghar, Jamshoro, Sukkur, Larkana, Khairpur, and Jacobabad from

August 17 to 22 with occasional gaps.

In Balochistan, rain/wind/thunderstorms (with isolated heavy falls) is expected in Barkhan, Musakhel, Loralai, Sibi, Zhob, Qilla Saifullah, Khuzdar, Lasbela, Awaran, Keoch, Gwadar, and Panjgur from August 17 to 21.

Urban centres, including Islamabad, Lahore, Peshawar, and Gujranwala, may experience heavy rainfall from August 17 to 19, it said, adding that several areas in Sindh, including Karachi and Hyderabad, may experience the same from August 17 to 22 with occasional gaps.

During the forecast period, landslides and mudslides may cause road closures in the hilly areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, Galiyan, and Kashmir.

Punjab floods warning

On the other hand, Punjab's Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) issued red alerts for multiple districts and warned about heavy flooding in the coming days due to an increase in water levels in reservoirs and rivers.

The Indus River is swelling to medium level, while Chenab, Jhelum, Ravi, and the low-level flooding is ongoing at Tarbela and Taunsa Barrage. Sulehri River is experiencing low-level flooding at Ganda Singh Wala, with a water flow of 68,000 cusecs. Jhelum River is flowing normal at key points and adjoining streams. Chenab River's flow is normal at key points, while Jhelum's flow is also normal in Nullah Palkhoo (Cunningham). The Indus River is normal at key points, while low-level flooding continues in Nullah Basanta.

Tarbela Dam is 98 per cent full while Mangla Dam is 68pc full. India's water releases, meanwhile, have increased to 50,000 cusecs.

PTI has urged the government to immediately move to safer locations, cooperate with the authorities concerned in case of emergency evacuations, and refrain from recreational activities near the rivers during flood conditions. The PDMA also warned of heavy rainfall in most districts of Punjab, particularly the northern districts of Lahore, Faisalabad, and Sahiwal, and cloudbursts. The seventh spell of monsoon rains is relatively stronger, with forecasts of severe downpours, it added.

Villagers throng Nauseri Dam to collect timber after Neelum floods

Many question govt's claims of halting deforestation after sudden accumulation of logs

By Tariq Naqash

MUZAFFARABAD: Villagers have been thronging the Nauseri Dam on the Neelum River for the past two days to collect floating timber, risking their lives amid efforts by the forest department to stop what it terms "unlawful" cutting of logs.

The dam, located about 41km northeast of Muzaffarabad, has been blanketed by logs and firewood carried downstream by cloudburst-induced floods in Neelum Valley on Aug 14. The river forms the reservoir for the Neelum-Jhelum Hydroelectric Project (NJHP).

The sudden accumulation of logs triggered a debate on social media, with many questioning the government's claims of halting deforestation.

The coalition government in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has repeatedly boasted that it ended large-scale timber felling and smuggling. However, some



VILLAGERS haul firewood to the roadside from Nauseri Dam, about 41km from Muzaffarabad, after cloudburst-induced floods in Neelum Valley blanketed the reservoir with timber on Aug 14.—AFP

users remarked that the presence of many logs at the dam suggested otherwise.

"This massive timber had been cut in areas hidden from the public eye on a large scale," said Mir Naseer Ahmed, a social activist from the vicinity of the dam.

AJK's Chief Conservator of Forests Asad Mahmood dismissed the allegations:

"Social media reports alleging large-scale forest damage and departmental losses are base-

less," he told Dawn.

He explained that a cloudburst in the upper catchment areas of Kamoh and Bangas streams in Neelum Valley had triggered massive floods on Aug 14, uprooting trees and sweeping large amounts of timber into the Neuseri reservoir. The affected area, he pointed out, was previously under lease to the now-defunct Azad Kashmir Logging and Sawmills Corporation.

"Around 80 per cent of the

accumulated wood at Nauseri Dam is firewood, while only a small portion is construction-grade timber," he added.

Mr Mahmood said the forest department had launched an emergency operation to retrieve usable timber from the reservoir. However, he lamented, villagers from surrounding areas repeatedly disrupted the process by collecting wood themselves, raising risks of potential law and order issues.

He added that Conservator Mir Naseer Ahmed and DFO Mazhar Naqvi were stationed at the site to supervise the operation.

'Opportunity to earn'

On Saturday, hundreds of people on both sides were profitably hauling floating logs to the roadside in small heaps. "We have sacrificed our land and submerged our graves for this dam. In return, we got nothing."

"Today, if we have found an opportunity to earn something [from this timber] we should not be stopped," said one villager.

"With no fuel, there is no traffic on the main road for some time, but the forest department appeared unyielding."

Later, the department set up a boom in the dam to prevent timber from being drifted.

PTI shelves politics for now to aid flood victims

- Directs workers to take part in relief and rescue operations
- Urges all Pakistanis to extend their helping hand to distressed families
- Condemns Sindh governor's remarks as 'attack on democracy'

By Iram Junaidi

statement read.

The party had previously called for rallies on Aug 14, following a protest on Aug 5, a number of its workers were arrested during the Aug 14 demonstrations. The statement said the recent spell of torrential rains and flash floods caused havoc, "claiming hundreds of precious lives and separating families and causing widespread destruction".

The leadership urged members to set aside political engagements and mobilise resources for relief efforts, while appealing to the Pakistani for their help and generous support to share in the suffering of these fellow citizens.

"In this challenging time, PTI reaffirms its commitment to serve the people and will continue to support all efforts aimed at mitigating the crisis," the statement concluded.

"We pray for the safety and recovery of all affected communities and urge collective action to overcome this calamity".

Reaction over Tessori's remarks

Separately, PTI has strongly condemned

remarks by Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori, alleging his comments were a "disrespect on democracy" and a grave insult to the people of Karachi. A PTI spokesperson said Mr Tessori's recent remarks undermine the democratic process. He cited a comment from the governor, "Go ahead, vote again — what happened the last time?" as evidence.

He said such statements suggest elections are manipulated and decisions are made by powerful unelected quarters.

He stated that Tessori's accusations people if they wanted the old MQM back, which he called "a clear reference to the return of Altaf Hussain's style of politics, long associated with violence, fear, and extortion in Karachi". He alleged Tessori's remarks exposed the MQM's democratic posturing as hollow.

"Tessori's comments are part of a dangerous attempt to disillusion the public and erode their faith in the power of the vote," the spokesperson added. "They are being used to justify the blatant rigging witnessed in the 2024 general elections."

Flash floods ruin infrastructure in Gilgit-Baltistan

Cloudburst-triggered floods leave 9-year-old boy dead in Haramosh Valley; portion of Naltar Highway and Baltistan Highway bridge swept away

By Jamil Nagri

GILGIT: Flash floods continued to wreak havoc across Gilgit-Baltistan on Saturday, leaving one person dead, eight injured, and dozens displaced. Roads and bridges were swept away, thousands—including tour-

ists—remained stranded at multiple locations, and electricity, mobile, and internet communication were disrupted in the region.

Cloudburst-triggered flash floods hit multiple areas, adding to the miseries of local communities.

According to the Gilgit-Baltistan Disaster Management Authority (GBDMA), a nine-year-old boy, Zulparain Haider, tragically lost his life in a landslip while returning from the summer pasture to his village, Hanochal in Haramosh Valley of Gilgit, on Saturday.

Addressing a press briefing, GB Home Minister Shams Lone said that the Baltistan Highway bridge had been swept away, cutting off four districts of Baltistan from

Gilgit for a second consecutive day.

Since Friday, at least 35 people have lost their lives, many more have been injured, and four people remain missing. "So far, 318 houses have been completely demolished, and 674 have been partially damaged," Lone said, adding that the GB government lacked the resources to cope with the extensive destruction. However, he noted that army troops were conducting relief operations.

A portion of the Naltar Highway was swept away, leaving a large number of tourists stranded. The flash floods in Naltar also damaged three hydropower generation stations, suspending electricity supply to Gilgit. Residents are also facing a shortage

of drinking water.

In Daosch, Bagrot Valley, a bridge and nearly half a dozen houses were damaged, while in Ghanche district, flash floods destroyed three key bridges, cutting off several villages. Dozens of houses were damaged, and 67 families in Haldi village were shifted to tents.

Resident of the Guru Jaglot area of Gilgit damaged seven houses with flash floods entering many houses. In Gilgit village, flash floods destroyed three homes, private infrastructure, crops, and agricultural land. Thousands of residents in Ghizer district also remained cut off from other areas.

The Karakoram Highway (KKH) at Gulmit has remained closed for several

days, disconnecting residents of Gojal and severing the Pakistan-China road link.

NDMA issues alert

Meanwhile, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has issued an alert warning of possible glacier lake outburst floods (GLOFs), heavy rain, and landslides in the northern areas until September 7.

The NDMA also advised tourists to avoid traveling to affected regions and not to cross rivers or streams.

GB has been experiencing an unusual heatwave since June, resulting in unprecedented glacier melting. Temperatures have risen by 48pc above normal, which has been the main cause of the recent disaster.

PAKISTAN BURNS NEAR PADDY STRAW ANNUAL TO THE COUNTRY'S AIR

BREATHING AIR IS OUR RIGHT

Every person shall be entitled to a sustainable environment. — Amritpal Singh

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

PRINCIPAL PARTNER: UNITED NATIONS PAKISTAN

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By Numan Khan

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'Car dealer' found shot dead in North Karachi graveyard

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI: A man, said to be associated with sale and purchase of cars, was found shot dead inside a graveyard on Saturday, police said.

They said that the body stuffed in a drum was found in the Muhammad Shah graveyard in North Karachi.

The corpse was shifted to the Abbas Shaheed Hospital for medico-legal formalities. The victim was later identified as Ali Asghar, 41, a resident of Orangi Town, Sector 14-B.

His family told the police that he left home at 1am on Saturday but did not return.

Sir Syed SHO Faruk Hashmi told Dawn that it appeared that he was killed sometime else and later his body was dumped in the graveyard. He said he was shot in the head.

He said that his relatives told the police that he had some monetary and property disputes as he was involved in property dealing and sale/purchase of cars.

Man gunned down in Korangi

In Korangi, unidentified assailants shot dead a 30-year-old man on Saturday.

Police said Dildar Mola Bux was killed near Ghosla Masjid, Sector 41B, Korangi.

A police officer said the victim left his workplace, a factory's canteen, to purchase something when armed motorcyclists shot him and rode away. He suffered bullet wounds in the head and face and died on the spot.

The police ruled out the possibility of a robbery attempt as his cell phone and cash were not taken.

They suspected some personal enmity behind the incident.

The body was shifted to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre for medico-legal formalities.

Sindh government dispatches aid to flood-hit regions

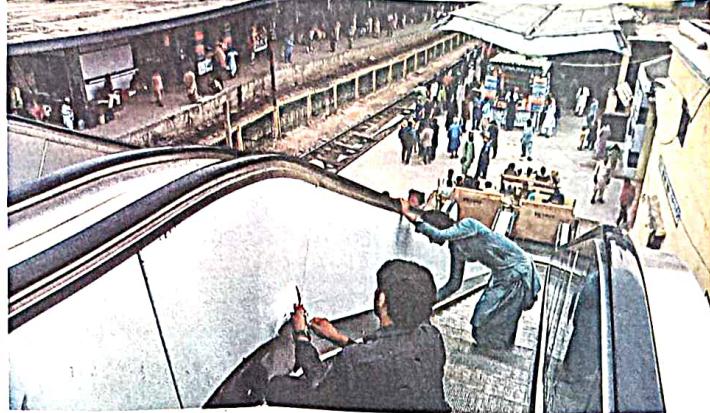
KARACHI: The Sindh government has dispatched a water filtration plant to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and 10 trucks loaded with ration bags and other essential food items for the flood-affected families, a statement said.

Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah has held a telephone conversation with the governor of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) and extended condolences over the loss of lives caused by the floods. The Sindh CM Secretariat also established contact with the GB CM Secretariat to coordinate possible assistance.

CM Shah conveyed deep grief over the loss of lives in GB and assured that the Peoples Party government will extend every possible support to the flood-hit population of the region. "The Sindh government shares the pain of our brothers in Gilgit-Baltistan and will provide all possible assistance in this time of need," he said.

Meanwhile, the CM held a meeting with a high-powered Ethiopian delegation to discuss climate change cooperation, tree plantation and green development initiatives.

The delegation, led by Ethiopia's Ambassador Dr. Jemal Bekor Abdu, briefed the CM on the Green Legacy Initiative, under which Ethiopia has planted more than 40 billion trees since 2010. — Dawn Report



KARACHI: Escalators have been installed at the Karachi Cantonment Railway Station to facilitate travellers' movement. — Fahim Siddiqi / White Star

Fate of MUCT collection via KE bills hangs in the balance

• After withdrawing TV licence fees, federal govt plans to end complexities in electricity bills to provide relief to consumers

• Mayor Wahab says only City Council has authority to make decisions on municipal tax

• Opposition leader says tax should be collected by UCs and not via KE bills

By Imran Ayub

KARACHI: A year after the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) celebrated the collection of controversial Municipal Utility Charges and Tax (MUCT) through KE electric bills, the fate of this unpopular tax now hangs in the balance as the federal government is planning to withdraw several levies from electricity bills in order to remove signed agreement to collect the money and dedicate

plexities" and provide relief to consumers.

As part of withdrawing levies, the federal government has already removed TV Licence Fees from electricity bills and is going to withdraw electricity duty soon.

Power Minister for Power, Sardar Awan Alihan Khan Leghari had recently written letters to all local authorities about the decision to discontinue the MUCT Electricity Duty through electricity bills and sought their support in removing complexities arising out of multiple charges, taxes, and duties being collected through consumer bills.

He said burden of levies along with high electricity tariffs complicates the billing structure, making it difficult for consumers to understand and manage their electricity costs.

The development has triggered unease at the KMC, whose prime source of earning in the head of MUCT comes from electricity bills.

According to a question, Mayor Wahab said: "The KMC is collecting MUCT with the legal cover of a court verdict. If there is any new proposal from the federal government, it is ultimately the elected City Council that holds the constitutional right to decide on this matter."

The MUCT was decided to be collected in June 2022 when the KMC and K-Electric

pal tax through monthly electricity bills. However, its implementation was delayed amid widespread public outcry and legal and political opposition until a court ruling in July 2024 cleared the path for its collection.

The tax applies on consumers using over 100 units.

Since then KMC officials have been describing the tax as essential to reviving municipal infrastructure.

However, the largest opposition party in the City Council, Jamiat-e-Islami, is supporting Islamabad on this tax matter and said that the collection of MUCT through KE bills is totally illegal and unconstitutional.

Advocate Asifuddin, leader of the opposition in the City Council, says that federal government "is absolutely right". However,

he didn't directly "oppose" the tax, but strongly challenged the decision to collect it through the power utility bill, arguing that the procedure being adopted to collect the MUCT was illegal.

He added that his job [collection of MUCT] should be devolved to union committees and in return, you offer them reward for meeting the [MUCT collection] target or exceeding the target," he said, adding: "This would help UCs as well to generate revenue and give them motivation to do the job with more willingness."

On August 14, the KMC issued a circular to all concerned bodies to implement the KIV Project.

This charter of demands includes a judicial inquiry into the recent killings of lawyers, the Moro incidents, opposition to the construction of six canals on the Indus River, corporate farming and the recent amendments to the Prevention of Electronic

Crimes Act.

Mayor urges prime minister to take notice of Sindh governor's political activities

Wahab lays foundation stone for uplift schemes in Korangi district; says Karachi is transforming under Bilawal's leadership

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI: City Mayor Barrister Murad Wahab on Sunday criticised Sindh CM Murad Ali Shah for his recent statement and asked the prime minister to take immediate notice of his involvement in political activities.

"Can a governor be engaged in politics? The governor should not carry any political party's flag. He should raise the slogan of Pakistan Zindabad, not represent any party. He should work without distinction of any kind. We are serving without distinction of any kind. Who is the person which UC belongs to whom; if there are Karachites living there, then Bilawal Bhutto's party will certainly deliver services. We are serving the people of Korangi in an opportunity and are passing the baton to it," he added.

Mr Wahab said that public convenience and urban development were his

top priorities.

"Today's Karachi is transforming under the leadership of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and the people are expressing full confidence in the Pakistani People," he said. "We are serving without distinction of any kind. We are serving without distinction of any kind. Who is the person which UC belongs to whom; if there are Karachites living there, then Bilawal Bhutto's party will certainly deliver services. We are serving the people of Korangi in an opportunity and are passing the baton to it," he added.

Mr Wahab said that it had been decided that after 22 years, an improvement was finally made to Karachi's water infrastructure with the completion of the new Hub Canal. "This revolutionary step is a slap in the face of those who only made promises."

He added that the K-IV project has already been inaugurated five times by five different prime ministers and leaders, but no real progress was made. "Now, your jiajal mayor and deputy mayor have completed the new Hub Canal, which is also a major project. We have also begun work on the parts of the K-IV Project assigned to our government."

He also mentioned that a center for special children has been established in Korangi by the PPP, where free medical treatment, education, and training are provided.

With the support of the Sindh chief minister and the health minister, a Child Health Center has also been set up in the district, fully equipped by the PPP government, he said.

Sindh records low yield of sugar cane, less production of sweetener

By Mohammad Hussain Khan

HYDERABAD: Sindh has recorded less sugarcane and sugar production in the 2024-25 season. The 2025-26 season is inching towards commencement of cane crushing. Besides, low sugarcane yield and sweetener production in 2024-25 also remained lesser than what was reported in the 2023-24 season.

The figures collected by Dawn show that 16,404,673.911 tonnes of sugarcane was crushed in the 2024-

25 season when 1,618,318.200 tonnes of sugar was produced. Sucrose recovery was recorded at 9.482pc.

However, when compared with the 2023-24 season when sucrose recovery had stood at 10.37pc with 2,022,780.911 tonnes of sugar produced, the 2024-25 season saw 1,679,206.41 tonnes of cane was crushed.

This year so far, 0.268 hectares of sugarcane crop sowing was reported by agriculture department as per first estimate against a target of 0.299 hectares. In 2024-25, the statistics show, against target of

0.295 hectares the crop was sown on 0.285m hectares.

Heatwave, crop disease

Some progressive sugar cane growers, like Maasroor Soomro from Dadu and Mahmood Nawaz Shah from Tando Allahyar, say that the lesser sugarcane production in 2024-25 season could be attributed to a severe heatwave and crop disease factors.

"I had to control the stem borer disease that hit my crop," Soomro recalled, adding that it was on a

massive scale. "The friends I had been coordinating with last year for crop assessment were telling me that sugarcanes crop grown in Sakrand and beyond had reported the same disease problem," he said.

Cane crushing figures

According to the 2024-25 cane crushing figures released by Sindh Commodity Commission's office, sugar mills located in Ghorki district came up with the highest numbers. Some are owned by politicians like Jehangir Tareen, Makhdoom

Khusro Bakhtiar and Maher brothers.

A sugarcane tonnage of 1,716,724.600 was crushed by JK Sugar Mills, Ghorki, followed by IDW Sugar Mills, Ghorki; 1,340,374.480 by Daharki Sugar Mills; 1,210,106.185 by Alliance Sugar Mills (Ubaro) Ghorki; and 1,016,236.43 by SGM Sugar Mills, Ghorki.

According to the 2024-25 cane crushing figures released by Sindh Commodity Commission's office, sugar mills located in Ghorki district came up with the highest numbers. Some are owned by politicians like Jehangir Tareen, Makhdoom

Growth of sugar industry and sucrose

Ghorki district has seen growth in sugar factories in the recent past. It was otherwise famous for cotton production. Sugarcane is grown in the riverine areas of upper Sindh as well by tycoons of the sugar industry.

Sindh's cane production and sucrose content recovery than Punjab's and in view of this recovery indicative, the notified price for the crop always remained a few rupees up from Punjab's crop till fixing of sugar cane crushing done by government.

Surge in Independence Day merchandise sales surprises retailers

Business of green & white clothing, badges, and Pakistani flags has crossed Rs1bn mark in Karachi alone, says Sharjeel Goplani

By Aamir Shafaat Khan

KARACHI: The sale of all sizes of Pakistani flags, green and white garments, and other items for kids, badges, bangles, T-shirts and other items hit all-time high as people celebrated Independence Day with a renewed zeal this year.

This year, Independence Day celebrations, titled Marka-I-Haq, began from August 1 to mark the country's victory against India in the four-day war in May.

While neither the government nor any private sector organisation maintain any data, many market people say that the sale of Independence Day related items was three to

four times high, breaking all past records. Giving conservative estimates, some market people claim only a 60 per cent rise in sales, fearing that higher tax authorities might attract the attention of the tax authorities amid record-high sales.

Private sector and businessmen have also shown great zeal this year by arranging flag hoisting ceremonies besides decorating their respective units and hoisting large sized flags on the businesses premises.

Rallies, fireworks and sporting events from August 1-4 were also arranged by political parties and the private sector organisations. Big cakes with Pakistan flag designs in large numbers were also prepared and cut at various events.

Hassan Ali Effendi Road, often called paper market, remained open late night on August 13 owing to a huge rush of buyers.

Retailers said that not only their current sales had remained in high demand, but the sales of stocks of last year were also cleared.

Green and white suits for children and adults, including Pakistani flag badges and small flags were also in high demand as a majority of schools held special assembly ses-

sions to commemorate Independence Day a day earlier on August 13.

Patron in chief of All City Tajir Itehad Association, Sharjeel Goplani said that this year was an exception in the country's history of celebrating Independence Day as sales of various items and accessories have crossed "Rs1 billion mark" in Karachi alone, which was 60 per cent higher than last year.

He said business of LED lights especially of green and white colours, children's garments, hair bands, mufflers, flags, badges, gloves, etc., remained robust.

The market also saw arrival of Chinese items like hair bands, colourful electrical LED lights, plastic jewellery items, etc.

"In past few years we used to attend only two to three programmes relating to flag hoisting on August 13. This year, I have attended six events on August 13 alone," he said, adding that he remained busy from August 1-4 in attending flag hoisting ceremonies in the city.



A CUSTOMER is shown dresses manufactured for August 14 at a wholesale shop in the Ghayali Building in Saddar. — Photo by Mohammad Asim Rehman



Unprepared nation

WEKS of monsoon rains since late June have culminated in catastrophe. In just two days, torrential downpours and cloudbursts unleashed flash floods across KP, killing more than 300 people. Entire villages have been erased from the map. A provincial rescue helicopter crashed in Mohmand during operations, claiming the lives of five crew members. In Azad Kashmir, mudslides buried whole families while in Gilgit-Baltistan glacier-fed torrents destroyed homes, bridges and farmland.

Nationwide, the National Disaster Management Authority has reported on at least 15 deaths and 905 injured since the start of the season, with KP bearing the brunt. With fresh rains forecast, the full scale of devastation is yet to be counted.

This is not some freak weather event. Pakistan is enduring the second massive flooding crisis in just three years. The 2022 floods, caused by record monsoon rains, submerged one-third of the country, killed 1,700 people and displaced 33m. These floods were described as a "climate catastrophe", drawing global attention to Pakistan's vulnerability. Today, the scenes from Buner and Ghizer echo that same nightmare — except the destruction is concentrated in the north, where steep terrain turns cloudbursts into deadly torrents. Could this scale of loss have been prevented? Scientists have long warned that climate change is making Pakistan's monsoons more erratic, cloudbursts more violent, and glacier melt more destructive. While no state can stop the rain, much of the tragedy stems from human failure. The Met Department's Aug 12 advisory did warn of heavy rain in KP, AJK and GB but it was scant on details for preparedness. Then there is the lack of land-use planning and weak enforcement of building restrictions in flood-prone areas. And our disaster response mechanisms leave much to be desired.

With more rain on the way, immediate measures are essential. Relief corridors must be cleared, with the army's engineering units building temporary bridges and restoring communication lines. Schools and mosques should be converted into evacuation centres, stocked with dry food and medicines. Wireless radios should be distributed where towers are down. In the longer term, adaptation must be treated as a survival priority, not an afterthought. The state must invest in a national observatory app, providing instant alerts and safety tips. With mobile penetration above 80pc, even simple voice-based or pictorial warnings could save lives. Alongside this, the Met Department must be upgraded with real-time monitoring capacity. Local governments need to build resilient housing, enforce safe construction zones, and strengthen embankments. Disaster insurance and relocation options for high-risk settlements are also overdue. The floods of 2010, 2022 and now 2025 mark an unbroken chain of escalating disasters. If Pakistan is to break this cycle, adaptation must move from rhetoric to reality. Lives depend on it.

Auto committee

On the face of it, the commerce ministry's decision to constitute a 'dedicated' committee to address the critical challenges facing Pakistan's struggling car industry is a welcome step. An official statement said that the body set up after the commerce minister's meeting with industry representatives 'will consist of officials from the commerce and industries ministries and FBR'. Though it remains unclear whether the government has notified the committee members, the commerce minister has already 'tasked' it with crafting a strategy that protects domestic car assemblers from a potential influx of imported used cars — in case the government allows their commercial import — encourages exports and aligns the industry with national industrial aims. Given the limited autonomy enjoyed by the ministries in a highly centralised governance system in Pakistan, the industry rightly believes that the new body will likely help to let the local assemblers address their issues.

The commerce minister's plan to add cars to the country's list of auto exports, alongside motorcycles and tractors, is ambitious at best and unrealistic at worst owing to the government's own policy inconsistencies and contradictions. Rhetoric aside, Budget 2026 has already made imported luxury vehicles a lot cheaper, and pushed up the prices of locally assembled cars. Similarly, the planned withdrawal of tariff protections for local carmakers — although a welcome move — risks tilting the playing field against local assemblers because of the very high cost of doing business, driven primarily by government taxes and energy prices. Unless the taxes on locally assembled cars are significantly slashed and the costs of doing business are brought down, the market will be swarming with imported cars, both old and new. It will not matter whether the protections are phased out or dismantled at once. The car industry's journey through the last four decades underline the reasons — policy uncertainty, high production costs, tariff and policy protections to powerful lobbies, etc — why Pakistan has failed to industrialise itself, spur market competition, encourage innovation and provide consumers with greater choices. No wonder that few think that the formation of yet another committee can help tackle the structural weaknesses that continue to hobble the auto industry. Without credible long-term policies that reduce crippling protection costs and prioritise competitiveness over protectionism, the auto sector will continue to proceed at a sluggish pace.

Relentless bigotry

THE DREAM of transforming Pakistan into a just and progressive nation will remain unfulfilled unless the prevailing extremism is checked. Moreover, no nation can prosper when its minorities live in fear of persecution and violence. In this regard, the Ahmadi community has been facing a sustained campaign of intimidation by violent bigots in Punjab as well as Sindh. The latest in a shameful series of events have been attacks on Ahmadi places of worship and homes in Faisalabad. Under the guise of Independence Day celebrations, a mob, reportedly led by a TLP leader, attacked and set ablaze two worship places of the minority group, while also beating up community members. Nearby homes belonging to Ahmadis were also attacked. Cases have been filed and some suspects detained. But it remains to be seen if those responsible for this outrage will actually be punished.

It is all the more shocking that these condemnable attacks occurred at a time when the nation was celebrating its freedom, and shortly after Pakistan had observed National Minorities Day to mark the Quaid's Aug 11 speech. The rulers never tire of brandishing their patriotic credentials. Yet it is unfortunate that they forgot what the father of the nation said on Aug 11, 1947: "that the first duty of a Government" is to protect "the life, property and religious beliefs of its subjects". In the same epic speech, Mr Jinnah observed that citizens of Pakistan are free to go to their temples, mosques "or to any other places of worship". Sadly, the state has forgotten this sage advice, and given violent extremists the space to do as they please — letting them attack and rob Pakistan's non-Muslims of their rights and dignity. The federal and Punjab governments must put a stop to these violent attacks and protect the lives and properties of minority citizens. Left unchecked, the ogre of extremism will tear society apart.

OPINION

BY MUHAMMAD AMIR RANA

Counterterrorism synergy

Restoration of confidence between the US and Pakistan has not come without a price for the latter.

It remains to be seen whether the recent surge in Pakistan-US relations — a reflection of Islamabad's strategy to reduce the trust deficit between the two countries or Washington's move, driven by broader geopolitical considerations.

This deficit was created mainly by the two countries' different approaches to Afghanistan, as well as Pakistan's enthusiasm for CPEC and its project that China could serve as an alternative to the US. Recently, Pakistan has opened new avenues for cooperation by quickly enhancing its counterterrorism support to Washington. The latest CT dialogue held recently in Islamabad was an expression of both sides' willingness to expand cooperation.

A day before the dialogue, the US State Department designated the proscribed Balochistan Liberation Army's military wing, the Majlis-e-Shura, as a foreign terrorist organisation. The move was not because only a couple of months earlier, Washington had removed the Resistance Front, considered to be the proscripted Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba from the same list. Many observers saw the addition of the Majlis-e-Shura as a balancing act between India and Pakistan given that India had accused the Resistance Front listing as a diplomatic victory and evidence of America's acknowledgement that the militant group, which India alleges is backed by Pakistan, was involved in the Patachara attack.

By sanctioning the Majlis-e-Shura, which is linked to the Jaish-e-Mohammed, which is linked to the Jaish-e-Mohammed, which is linked to the Resistance Front and Majlis-e-Shura were designated as internal procedures rather than as a concession to any side. The parallel drawn between the Patachara and Jaish-e-Mohammed incidents reinforces this perception. It is also worth noting that Pakistan had previously asked for the international designation of Majlis-e-Shura as a terrorist entity, but the request was not entertained.

The US and Pakistan have a long history of CT cooperation, dating back to 2001 when both countries formally engaged in a joint effort against the global threat of terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11. This engagement, however, has always been overshadowed by constraints arising from mutual

mistrust and conflicting geopolitical interests. Despite these challenges, the CT dialogue remained intact, except for a few disruptions after the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan.

Even before the Taliban's return to power, Pakistan had been struggling to maintain cordial relations with Washington. After August 2021, the situation worsened. In such circumstances, the CT dialogue faced disillusionment as both sides struggled to identify common interests to sustain cooperation. With Al Qaeda significantly weakened following the killing of Ayman al-Zawahiri, American interest declined. For Washington, the TPP was primarily acknowledged as Pakistan's internal problem, despite acknowledging in joint statements that it posed a threat to regional security. One of the major global security concern was the Islamic State Khorasan, which also had implications for US homeland security. Pakistan concentrated its CT efforts on IS-K and eventually delivered results that front, helping to restore America's confidence in bilateral CT cooperation. Not only did the recently re-elected Centcom chief, Gen Michael Kurilla, praise Pakistan as a "phenomenal partner" in the fight against IS-K, but President Donald Trump himself acknowledged Pakistan's support in handing over an IS-K terrorist to the US.

The progress achieved last year also brought tangible US support for enhancing Pakistan's investigative and prosecutorial capabilities, developing border security infrastructure and designing training to more than 300 police officers and frontline responders. The underlying objective has largely remained the CT dialogue as a continuous and reliable channel of engagement between the two countries.

A comparison of two joint statements, one issued in May 2024 during the Joe Biden administration and the other released last week, clearly illustrates how the CT dialogue has regained its lost momentum. The May 2024 statement was worded cautiously, noting that "Pakistan and the United States are reiterating their commitment to counter [IS-K], TTP and other terrorist organisations will advance security in the region and serve as a model of bilateral and regional cooperation to address transnational terrorism threats".

By contrast, last week's joint statement not only acknowledged Pakistan's sacrifices in the fight against terrorism but also expanded the scope of cooperation to include "the threats posed by the Balochistan Liberation Army", a long-standing demand of Pakistan.

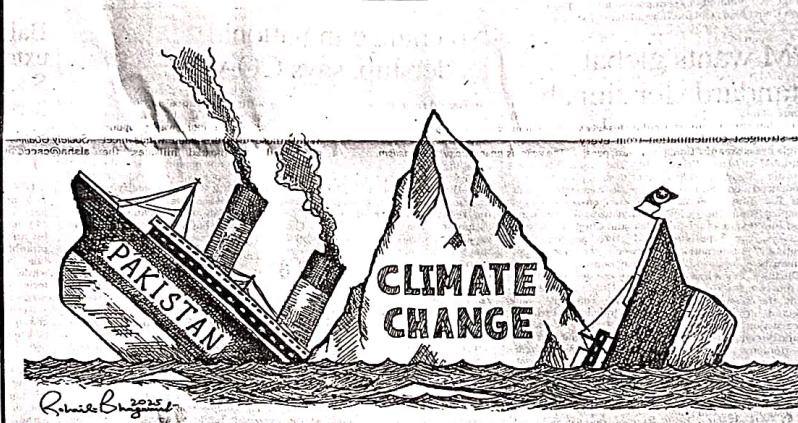
Extremely significant, Pakistan has long sought advanced technological support for its CT efforts. The latest statement reflects an agreement to strengthen institutional frameworks, enhance capabilities to respond to specific challenges and counter the use of new technologies for terrorism. This effectively acknowledges the threat posed by the militant use of drones, and signals that cooperation in this domain is likely to materialise in the coming weeks.

The restoration of confidence between the two countries and the enhancement of CT cooperation have not come without a price for Pakistan. Islamabad has drastically altered its Afghanistan policy, going so far as to trust the ruling Taliban as an adversary. Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi's visit was cancelled on US advice, reportedly due to the Taliban's growing ties with Russia and their increasing assertiveness.

Second, it has sought to balance its relations with China, operating under the assumption that Beijing, as a pragmatic ally, will not view Pakistan's growing ties with Washington with suspicion. The third is that Islamabad is China might welcome such developments, seeing them as an opportunity to elevate Pakistan's geopolitical and economic stature, which could benefit Beijing at the right time.

However, Afghanistan has re-emerged as a critical factor in Pakistan's internal security landscape and its ambitions to connect geopolitically and geo-economically with Central Asia. The concern is that Pakistan's national security planners often fail to adopt long-term, strategic perspectives, focusing instead on short-term gains. They seem content celebrating India's current diplomatic and geopolitical discomfort, without anticipating the challenges that may arise once New Delhi absorbs these shocks and recalibrates its approach. ■

The writer is a security analyst.



BY ABBAS NASIR

Alaska optics win for Putin

IF the Gaza genocide does not serve as a strong enough daily reminder of how bereft of principles Western politics is, images of Russia's President Vladimir Putin and his US counterpart Donald Trump beamed live from Alaska this weekend reinforced the point unequivocally.

President Trump makes no bones about how he despises the liberal Pelosi. In his bold and barbed quest for being acknowledged as a statesman, not only did he bring in from the cold the Russian leader who has been a pariah in the eyes of the West, since his invasion of Ukraine in 2022, but also gifted his guest a great optics win.

From the arrival at an airbase near Anchorage where they landed within minutes of each other and then alighted from their respective planes and walked on their respective carpet strips to where they converged, it was a carefully choreographed move that seemed more designed by the guest than the host.

As Trump waited for Putin to walk the final few steps he brought his two hands together to applaud the Russian leader and then the two met and shook hands, a handshake, parting each other in a gesture of respect, even affection. It isn't clear what the US TV networks were saying but the BBC seemed to struggle with the live broadcast.

The BBC North America correspondent saw the presence of P-35 stealth warplanes on the tarmac as a force projection. A flyby by a B2 stealth bomber and four F-35s was also similarly decked out with mention of how the US released their bunker buster bombs against Iranian nuclear sites in June.

But to the unbiased observer, Putin appeared amused rather than being awed or fearful at the spectacle. In all likelihood, he saw it as a salute by the USAF just as the soldiers lined up either side of the red carpet to present arms' salute with the live broadcast.

Such was the Russian leader's confidence at being welcomed back into acceptance by arguably the most powerful nation's president that he set aside protocol and security considerations to ride in the Trump limousine while his own limousine, flown in from Russia earlier, followed.

Again, bizarrely one of the people commenting on BBC TV said they didn't care if Putin spoke or understood English, while the Russian leader was visibly engaged in a continuous conversation with his host and later told the media he greeted Trump with a "Good afternoon, neighbour".

As the aircraft was pulling away from the airport, Putin smiled and waved to the cameras. The significance of all this is clear from the fact that over the past three years, Putin, who has been indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court in The Hague, has not been received by any Western country. And here the red carpet had been rolled out for him.

Till he arrived in Alaska, Putin did not appear prepared to return any part of eastern Ukraine.

After three hours of talks, the two leaders faced the media but did not answer questions. Putin read from a prepared statement when talking about the US-Russia history with specific reference to Alaska, he seemed to flatter Trump, noting that he endorsed the latter's view that the US would not have participated if he had been the US president.

Putin said the meeting, and what was agreed, will mark the beginning of peace in Ukraine. If he called it the "root causes" were addressed. For his part, Trump spoke briefly and started by describing the meeting as productive where many points were agreed on but a "few" remain. Before leaving the podium, he also said he would now meet the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, European leaders and Nato officials for consultations.

The discussions must have gone well with the

late-night White House announcement that the Ukrainian leader is arriving in Washington on Tuesday and will be received by Trump for talks. The European leaders too, reacted positively to whatever they were sold.

A peace deal will hinge on how far Putin and Zelensky and the latter's Western European allies are willing to compromise on their 'inland for peace' stance. Till he arrived in Alaska, Putin did not appear prepared to return any part of eastern Ukraine his forces have captured. He also seems to recognise his 2014 annexation of Crimea.

For now, the security guarantees for Ukraine that are being discussed exclude a westward expansion of Nato into Ukraine. Putin will be averse to Western boots on the ground. It will, inter alia, talk of Nato expansion plans that first spooked Russia because, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow saw Ukraine as a buffer between Europe-Nato and itself.

Trump's word may amount to much as has been demonstrated by his support to the Gaza ethnic cleansing by Israel in return to earlier reservations, but in this European context, he has moved away a shade from his earlier stance that only Ukraine will have to give up land for peace and it will be Europe and not the US which will offer security guarantees to Kiev.

But for Putin to leave the summit meeting bearing gifts one has to agree to, including the amount of land he would swap for peace. For now, he has pushed back by several weeks the likelihood of sterner US sanctions and also charmed his way to having Trump listen to his point of view face to face.

Trump can give himself any prize he wants. Like his guests have done, but hundreds of millions around the world will find any accolade he gets legitimate only if he moves from the end to the war in Ukraine to peace in Gaza and gives up displacement of the Palestinians. ■

The writer is a former editor of Dawn.

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OPINION

BY MUNA KHAN



Don't stop press

ONE of the hardest things about social media hashtag, i.e., doing it for critics, like deposed president of the hard club every day, as we did, for example, when Gen Musharraf pulled the plug, goes in 2007. I remember my two female colleagues from this paper and I going to the press club together to protest and then to police stations to check on our colleagues who had courted arrest. It did not matter that Geo was a reporter or that the young girls who also courted arrest were not in the paper. The issue of freedom of press was of more importance.

The channel should stay down again a decade later, but this time, there was much solidarity. A lot had changed, mainly the fissures within press organisations, the co-opting of journalists into regimes to push narratives, along with a culture of repression and censure. People forget that you couldn't say "establishment" in the PTI government whereas that word is freely bandied about. This isn't to suggest that Geo was not勇敢 as much as to say they've never not been.

Todays you only care about a person you define as a journalist because you subscribe to their viewpoint. That journalists have viewpoints and may as well be known as party spokespersons is the problem right there. Partisanship panders itself as news.

This is not unique to Pakistan. According to the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2023, global trust in the media is declining rapidly. Most people are dependent on social media and video platforms for their news. Online personalities and influencers shape public opinion now. I was most disturbed to read that 58 per cent of respondents (across 48 markets where the report was conducted) said "they feel unsure about their ability to distinguish truth from falsehood in online news".

This is where our work comes in. As journalists, we must stand by the very people we know are peddling falsehoods and benefiting monetarily from disinformation. Removing them from screens violates the provision of freedom of speech so we must stand for the principle. Because it can happen to us.

Imagine then the deafening silence from the West after Israel killed Gaza-based Al Jazeera reporter Anas al-Sharif and his crew, wiping out the entire Al Jazeera team there in the process. There is no justification for killing a journalist but this one in particular deserves the strongest condemnation from every single press organisation, politician, presi-

dent, prime minister etc. But it has been slow to come because Israel said Anas was with Hamas.

We have reached new levels of diabolicalness and very few are calling it such. "Frankly, I don't care if al-Sharif was in Hamas or not," president of the Foreign Press Association Ian Williams told CNN. "We don't kill journalists. We do what we do for the sake of our country." Republicans or Democrats. Al-Sharif worked 24 hours and couldn't possibly have time to work in a cell on the side."

Plenty has been written on Israel's murder of Anas and his colleagues — or total 238 journalists since the war began — including by Zahid Hussain on Wednesday, so I don't have anything new to say except that the young girls who also courted arrest were not in the paper. The issue of freedom of press was of more importance.

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The writer is an instructor of journalism.



BY AISHA KHAN

Nature's payback

THE frequency and intensity of disasters is increasing in Pakistan with every passing year. This phenomenon, if allowed to continue unabated, will extract a heavy toll on social, economic and political peace. After the Paris Agreement, it has become common practice in Pakistan to attribute every climate to climate change and cite lack of finance for unpreparedness. However, time has come for some serious soul searching and honest introspection.

Deforestation and disaster reinforce each other through a negative feedback loop. Forest cover in Pakistan has been declining at a rate of 0.25 per cent, while reckless deforestation plays a significant role in what we are witnessing today in the form of hydro-meteorological disasters and widespread devastation, wreaking havoc in the lives of communities.

The main forest areas in the country are situated in Azad Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan. According to the Global Forest Watch, in 2023, 1,036,937 kilohectares (2.3 million acres) of natural forest, extending over 12 per cent of its land area, in 2024, lost 235 hectares (581 acres) of natural forests, equivalent to 40.8 kilotonnes of carbon dioxide emissions. The region of Malakand stands out for being the most responsible with 50pc tree cover at 1.73 kha compared to an average of 43 ha between 2005 and 2024. Humza follows with loss of 1.48 kha of forest cover. KP has been losing forests at a rate of 1.5pc annually equivalent to 11,000 hectares per year between 2000 and 2023. In Chitral, projected loss under current trends is 23pc by 2030.

The loss of forest in the upper areas of Chitral, Kalam and upper Hazara has created large expansion gaps that is heating up much faster in the absence of tree canopy and undergrowth. This results in increasing the land-sea thermal contrast as sun-exposed soil can reach extreme surface temperatures (often 5-6 degrees Celsius higher) than land under forest cover. Higher ground temperature intensifies local low pressure zones, strengthening the "heat pump" effect that draws in monsoon winds inland from the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal. The reinforced vertical pull of hotter, drier surface air rises more vigorously when it collides with cool, moist air from the sea. The result is intense convective updrafts, making it the perfect recipe for cloud bursts and landslides, landslides, mudslides and even hydro-meteorological disasters.

This year the Arabian Sea surface temperature is about 0.5°C above average, with winds carrying more water vapour. When these moisture-laden winds meet deforested, superheated hillsides, the

uplift and condensation are explosive. What we see happening in AJK, KP and GB are disasters amplified by deforestation. The reports about the latest destruction of forest in Arandu Gol in Chitral and violation of forest rules in Makaiyan Guzara Forest in Hazara and Availi National Park are alarming and ominous developments. Deforestation is not only about environmental degradation, it is about erosion of human life, disruption of livelihoods, displacement of vulnerable communities and destruction of costly infrastructure. There is an urgent need for an inquiry into the aforementioned allegations to arrest deforestation before it becomes a cause of the next major disaster.

The lesson of floods in 1992 and 2010 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa now in Buner, Bajur, Mansehra, Buner and Swat should not be lost on us. The costs, both economic and social, are staggering. There is a direct connection between deforestation, flood severity and damages. Forest protection and taking firm action now can save us from another natural disaster.

Deforestation and disaster reinforce each other.

be decimated for timber, real estate development and money-making ventures by vested interest groups at the cost of compromising its emission reduction commitments.

Pakistan's track record is poor. It is woefully behind in meeting SDG goals, faces challenges in implementing climate policies and standards, and the ability to enforce forest rules and regulations is weak. In short, we can blame external factors and refuse to take internal responsibility for things that we can control to reduce risks?

Sustainable development makes it necessary to reduce future economic impacts, safeguard communities from displacement and preserve health and livelihoods. With unchecked deforestation we are contributing ourselves in harm's way, contributing to intensification of disasters and exposing more people to risks.

Our future resilience depends on ecological restoration of degraded ecosystems and protecting existing forests from exploitation and deforestation. ■

The writer is chief executive of the Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change. sasha@scccc.org.pk

FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1975 | Fifty years ago

B.D. peaceful

NEW DELHI: The new rulers of Bangladesh seemed to be in firm control of the country today [Aug 16] after yesterday's coup in which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was ousted as President and killed. Diplomatic sources said that the capital city of Dhaka and other Bangladesh towns were quiet, with the new Government of President Khondakar Mushtaq Ahmed apparently enjoying widespread support among the people. The new Bangladesh Cabinet today met for the first time... [For the second day running Bangladesh Radio has been broadcasting patriotic and revolutionary songs in English.] [A report from Dhaka says all members of Sheikh Mujib's family, except a child, were killed in yesterday's [Aug 15] pre-dawn coup, according to information received by a Western Embassy here. Although it is not known how many members were living with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his official residence the information said that only one child escaped death in the force's raid and the range of fire between the coup forces and Mujib's Rahbari Bari spanning the residence... [S]heikh Mujib was buried in his native village, Tungipura in Faridpur district, with full honours, Bangladesh Radio reported tonight.

1950 | Seventy-five years ago

Delhi pact measures

KARACHI: Certain important decisions to take more stern measures for implementing further the Delhi pact minorities were reached at a series of conferences held in Delhi and Karachi during the first fortnight of this month between the Minority Ministers of Pakistan and Bharat, the Chairmen of the Minority Commissions of East Pakistan and West Bengal and the Prime Ministers of both countries.

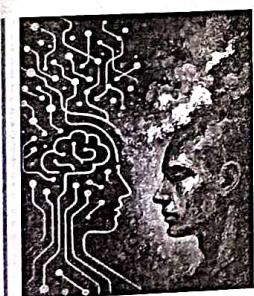
These conferences decided that to prevent communal incidents, special constables should be appointed from amongst influential persons, particularly belonging to the majority community in the areas where communal incidents take place frequently.

It had also been decided to impose collective fines on inhabitants of the area where a serious communal disturbance takes place in order to station a punitive police force in that area. In order to provide facilities to the returning migrants in East Pakistan, West Bengal and Assam the respective governments of the Provinces will try to get the returning migrants re-employed in their old jobs by persuading the employers of industrial labour and other private employers.

letters@dawn.com

Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



AI hallucinations and human mind

ChatGPT who the bully of the Middle East was, and fed a special instruction to give a one-word answer. It conveniently said it was Iran.

On the other hand, when I copy-pasted the same prompt in DeepSeek, it said it was Israel. Two different models, two different answers. Does AI make DeepSeek more reliable? No.

Each of these LLMs has been subjectively trained to do and propagate narratives as per it by the programmers. Ask DeepSeek about the plight of Uighurs in Xinjiang, and you will see that it refuses to answer any such question.

While I was preparing for an exam, I had asked DeepSeek about the economic and political system of China in the 21st century. After generalising a lengthy answer, it merely removed the generated output, saying that it was not equipped to answer the query.

On the usage side, Sam Altman, the head of OpenAI, which pioneered LLMs, is himself appalled by the reliability issues have exhibited on AI models. AI shortcomings in GPT-4 once went so far off the mark that it told me Pakistan got independence in 1952. Yes, it actually did. Such issues have already become so common that there is now a specific term for such outputs; AI hallucinations.

People are using LLMs and relying on them for everything from career guidance to medical advice and from personal conflicts to the broader socio-political issues.

Over time, this can help shape narratives as suited to those who own the chips and the models. For example, earlier it was the media that portrayed Muslim terrorists. Now the same platforms can be conveniently outsourced to available AI tools to give mass usage and reliance or trust to them.

One wonders if the juvenile justice committees that were legally required

future, we, the humans, cannot afford to outsource analytical thinking and natural human scepticism on any bit of information that the algorithms serve. People must use AI intelligently, and to verify AI-sourced content without allowing it to cloud human judgement completely.

Arooba Ghazal Lahore

Protecting juveniles

A DISTURBING trend has recently emerged on various social media platforms, with people posting videos and images of underaged, handcuffed suspects in police custody. Most of these images are posted online by individuals belonging to the legal profession seeking social media traction. This is not just ethically reprehensible; it is a clear violation of the Juvenile Justice System Act, 2018, and a breach of both professional and constitutional responsibilities.

Under Section 13 of the Act, revealing the identity, image, or case details of any child under 14 years is prohibited.

Section 13(2) further emphasises that juveniles must not be handcuffed, unless previously convicted of a heinous offence punishable by death or life imprisonment.

Worse still, juveniles are being detained in police stations or jails, sometimes for up to two weeks, in incomplete disregard of Section 6, which bars placing a juvenile in police custody in any circumstances.

The law, instead, mandates the use of observation homes and juvenile rehabilitation centres, neither of which appear to be functioning adequately in most districts.

One wonders if the juvenile justice committees that were legally required

to be formed within three months of the Act's implementation in 2018 have actually been established in every district.

In a recent case, I witnessed four boys—none over the age of 18—arrested by local police on suspicion of "planning a crime". The Act clearly envisions the use of preventive detention of minors.

More often, police failed to notify the magistrate or trace the guardians, as is required under the law. Instead of being sent to observation homes, they were unlawfully kept in police custody and were later released allegedly on return of gratification.

The government has a constitutional duty to ensure the protection of children, but this does not fall on the state alone. Senior lawyers, as officers of the court, bear the professional responsibility to assist the courts in safeguarding legislative values. Judicial officers, too, must exercise vigilance against such widespread violations.

It is only through a reformative and child-centred approach, as envisioned in the preamble of the Juvenile Justice System Act, that we can protect the rights of our most vulnerable citizens.

Syed Rehman Hayder Chiniot

A key difference

THIS is with reference to the editorial 'Another attempt' [Aug 6]. The fact that there has been no attempt to get the juvenile justice party leader freed out of two years of incarceration prior to that, and that the party and its leader are not as popular as they believe, or they want others to believe.

They fully expected that United States President Donald Trump would secure his release from prison but did not happen. They spent millions on lobbying in order to persuade US Congressmen to do the bidding, but to no avail.

Recently, his two sons flew to the US for the same purpose, and returned without any result. They even spent a huge amount placing an advertisement in the New York Times, calling attention to the US' "prison's plight" and appealing for his release. Where is all this money coming from?

Other Pakistani leaders, past and present, have been jailed for periods much longer than the former prime minister, but they did not go to any such length to secure their release.

And, this is despite the fact that the man has been jailed for corruption after an extended legal process on the basis of tangible evidence that was available against him. Perhaps the other political leaders who were jailed in the past did not have as much wealth as he surely has.

Shakir Lakhani Karachi

► **TAX FILING:** The newly introduced Tax Asaan application of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) will likely make the task of filing income tax returns a considerably easier. Given the low level of computer literacy in the country, very few people would be able to understand the app and access the portal. Besides, overseas Pakistanis not using Pakistani cellular connections would find it difficult to do so. It is understandable how the tax collectors will handle hundreds of returns of their clients as the simple system of accessing through user name and password has been done away with. The FBR should revert to the old system if it intends to increase the number of filers.

Saleem Adil Karachi

► **MISMANAGED CONCERT:** I attended the Independence Day concert held in Hyderabad recently, and was deeply disappointed by the arrangements. The venue was over crowded, and nobody seemed to have any real control over the audience. I personally witnessed girls being harassed by groups of boys. Such incidents not only break the spirit of the occasion, but also created a threatening environment for the attending families. Public events, especially those marking our independence, should be safe and welcoming for everyone. The authorities should plan better and ensure proper security at such events.

Muhammad Farhan Hyderabad

► **A COSTLY BIRTHDAY GIFT:** The recent birthday wish to the president of Pakistan in the shape of newspaper advertisements placed by the Sindh government was worth millions of rupees, making it one of the costliest birthday gifts from anybody to anyone anywhere. What was the purpose of such an arrangement except political publicity? Taxpayers do not like their money to be wasted like this. However, one needs some level of moral sensitivity, political astuteness and thoughtfulness to realise this. A birthday wish is a personal matter, and a private communication is most appropriate.

Khayyam Durrani Karachi

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is Dawn's External Ombudsman (EO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. EO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is EO who takes notice of any alleged violations of Dawn's code of ethics and practices and refers the Editor for appropriate action.

Email: dawnoombudsman@gmail.com

Futile research leading the nation nowhere

EVERY year, massive funds are allocated for research projects in Pakistan through the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and the Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF). One wonders what is the outcome of all this research supposedly going on in the country.

The fact is that much of this so-called research is either low-impact replicated research of formal studies, or worse, paperwork with no actual experimental work. Several public universities are becoming factories churning out irrelevant publications designed merely to boost curriculum and vitas (CVs) for faculty promotions and appointment against administrative pressure.

Alarming reports indicate that many grants are awarded not on merit, but through personal connections, nepotism or even bribes. The selection committees, often lacking effective transparency, enable a culture of mediocrity, and some

investigators are known to divert funds without any meaningful scientific output. Pakistan's research and development (R&D) spending remains below 0.3 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Despite the creation of more than 20,000 research articles in 2022, fewer than 4pc were cited internationally, and hardly any translated into patents or solutions.

We are clearly happy with published papers, but not interested in their progress. It is time to tie funding to real, measurable outcomes, and to bring transparency to the entire grant approval process. Without structural reforms, public research funds will continue to be wasted, while the problems remain unresolved.

Mubarak Ali Khan
Mardan





Four Margalla trails closed after heavy rain forecast

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: The capital administration on Saturday closed four trails of the Margalla Hills for three days in view of very heavy and torrential rainfall forecast.

The trails were closed for the safety of the public to prevent hiking and visits to the hills.

Notification issued from the office of the district magistrate stated that, in view of the heavy to very heavy and torrential rainfall forecast for the next 72 hours by the Pakistan Meteorological Department, and based on recommendations by the director general (CES), CDA, and considering the safety of citizens, including hikers and visitors to the Margalla Hills, it is hereby notified that Trail 2, Trail 3, Trail 5 and the trail behind Saidpur village shall remain closed to the general public until August 19.

An official of the capital administration said that the capital police had been directed to ensure that the order is followed in letter and spirit.

Police personnel have also been deployed at the starting points of the trails at the foothills to prevent anyone from hiking or visiting the hills.

Other concerned departments have been alerted to closely monitor water flow in the nullahs and streams across Islamabad and to take all precautionary measures.

They have been instructed to seek assistance immediately if water levels rise.

Residents living near nullahs and streams have also been advised to remain vigilant and take precautions.

Similarly, all rescue departments have been put on alert to respond to any emergency or incidents.

Low-lying areas of Islamabad will also be closely monitored over the next few days.

Passing-out parade of 50 ASIs held

By Our Staff Reporter

RAWALPINDI: A passing-out parade of 50 ASI probationers from Gilgit-Baltistan and two from Azad Kashmir was held at the Police College Sihla.

IGP Gilgit-Baltistan Afzal Mehmood Butt was chief guest on the occasion.

Addressing the ceremony, he said the administration of Police College Sihla deserved congratulations for playing a practical role in completion of the course.

He said probationers should complete their training with the same spirit and hard work.

Commandant Khan said Police College Sihla was the largest training institution in Pakistan and had trained more than 100,000 employees and officers of law enforcement agencies so far.

He said keeping in mind field work of the officers, all the modules have been prepared with the guidance and support of the training directorate which included character building, legal studies, policing and physical training.

He said they were also given practical training in field craft VVIP protection, anti-hot training, Rescue 1122 assistance, rescue operation course, basic computer techniques, Punjab police (Polcom) system and mobile forensics.



MUNICIPAL workers stage a protest at Liaquat Bagh in Rawalpindi on Saturday. The protesters were demanding regularisation of their services. — Online

Ring Road project set to miss deadline as monsoon rains slow down work

Revised PC-I will be sent for final approval after increase in construction material prices, says official

By Aamir Yasin

RAWALPINDI: The much-triumphed Rawalpindi Ring Road project worth Rs32.9 billion will likely miss the deadline of December 2025 with its cost set to further escalate by 40 to 50 per cent.

A senior official of the divisional administration told Dawn that more than 70 per cent work had been completed. However, for the last one month, work has slowed down and is likely to get momentum after the monsoon season next month.

He said work on the revised PC-I had started as prices of construction material and loading vehicle charges

increased manifold during the last two years. The revised PC-I will be sent to the Central Development Working Party (CDWP) and then Ecenec for final approval.

The current monsoon badly impacted the mega project as the last seven spells of rains slowed down the construction work.

To likely miss the deadline of December 2025 fixed by Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz,

The official said the construction work also slowed down due to a lack of timely decision on how to merge the traffic from Thalian to the motorway.

The National Highway Authority (NHA) had proposed additional lanes on the motorway to merge to the traffic coming from Ring Road.

“However, he said, the NHA project of expansion of motorway lanes was still pending in the planning division, so the contractor gave a suggestion to the Punjab government that it would construct one kilometer-long merger road from its own funds and later the

NHA should expand the lanes.

Project cost escalation

A senior official of the divisional administration told Dawn that the contractor, Frontier Works Organization (FWO), demanded an increase in the cost by more than 50 per cent. It will be the second increase in the project cost. The first increase was estimated to be Rs2.5 billion and it was increased early this year to Rs32.9 billion after getting approval from Ecenec. The total cost of the project increased to Rs39 billion. Rs6 billion for land acquisition and Rs32.9 billion for the construction of the road.

The official said the cost of construction material had increased as compared to August 2023. He said the consultant of the project, Nepal, had been asked to revise the PC-I.

When contacted, Deputy Project Director Aslam Sial confirmed to Dawn that the project deadline would be extended due to the slow work.

“Commissioner Rawalpindi Division

who is project director of Rawalpindi Ring Road visited the project site last week and asked the contractor to speed up the work in coming days to meet the deadline but the work will get momentum after monsoon,” he said.

He said that the contractor had demanded minimum 50 per cent price increase in the government will allow 44 per cent. About the merger of traffic at Thalian, the deputy project director said that the NHA had given a non-objection certificate to construct a one-kilometre road along the motorway to merge the traffic.

They were trying to solve the issue of merging traffic on the motorway with NHA but it delayed it. However, he said FWO will construct the patch and the remaining expansion of two lanes will be completed by NHA.

About the construction work, he said the 38.3km Ring Road will connect Chaklala, Adiala Road, Chaklala Road and Thalian and the work on these interchanges was in progress and would be completed soon.

Civil society coalition hails removal of taxes on contraceptives

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: The Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) Coalition on Population, led by the Population Council in collaboration with UNFPA, has welcomed the government's decision to waive all taxes on contraceptives.

This achievement marks the culmination of sustained advocacy by the CSOs Coalition, which began in 2022 with a public call to remove taxes on contraceptives.

Acting on behalf of the Coalition, the Population Council engaged directly with the finance minister, presenting evidence-based arguments for the change and providing an aide-memoire to the state minister of finance to reinforce the case,” the statement said.

Overall, 23pc of couples obtain contraceptives from pharmacies, shops and the private sector.

This large segment of the population will directly benefit from the tax waiver. With a 17pc unmet need for contraceptives, women are disproportionately affected, often enduring repeated pregnancies and bearing the heavy burden of raising their families.

The removal of taxes is a first step for

Pakistan to ensure affordable and uninterrupted access to a wide range of contraceptive methods — essential for improving the well-being of its people and achieving sustainable population growth.

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The coalition stressed that sustaining the momentum requires further steps, including a strategic purchasing role for private sector providers, free supply of condoms, family registration, and steady supply of affordable Long Acting Reversible Contraceptives (LARCs) to ensure equitable access nationwide.

Capital police register another case against PTI leaders, workers

By Munawer Azeem

ISLAMABAD: The capital police registered another case against the local leadership and workers of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), booking over a hundred people accused of criminal charges.

The case was registered at the Industrial Area police station under Sections 324, 341, 435, 186, 188, 353, 148, 440, 436, 382, 109 and 427 of the PPC, along with Section 8 of the PPA Act.

According to the FIR, the police constable involved in a police for law and order duty when, all of a sudden, a gathering of 100 to 120 people armed with batons, stones, iron rods, slingshots and PTI flags appeared from different sides of Rawalpindi and Muree Road on vehicles and motorcycles.

The chief minister, government, anti-police, anti-state and anti-institution slogans and reached close to the police contingent. They also blocked the road for the general

public.

The gathering was informed about Section 144 of the CrPC imposed in Islamabad, under which their assembly was unlawful and in violation of the Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Act, the FIR alleged.

Police were asked to disperse peacefully, but when they attacked the police with batons, iron rods and slingshots. They also beat policemen, snatched anti-riot gear from them and set the gear on fire.

They beat and injured three police officials and tore the uniform of two others.

More police contingents were called to the area, and later, 23 participants of the gathering were arrested, while the rest managed to escape. Those who were arrested told police that the ones who fled were workers and activists of the PTI.

They said they had received instructions from the local leadership of the PTI to continue the protest until the release of the party's founder.

RDA bans sale, purchase of plots in University Town Housing Scheme

Residents complain about snake, mosquito infestations, poor infrastructure

By Aamir Yasin

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) on Saturday imposed a ban on the sale and purchase of plots within the University Town Housing Scheme, while also directing a development freeze and legal action.

RDA Director General Kinza Murtaza visited the University Town Housing Scheme and announced an immediate ban on sale and purchase involving plots and files in the society due to serious issues related to incomplete and unauthorised development.

The inspection, which covered Blocks A, B, C, E, and F, revealed

multiple violations, including the lack of proper services design approval from RDA, despite ongoing development and plot sales to the public.

The DG RDA voiced grave concerns over the deteriorating infrastructure, such as unpaved main roads, widespread encroachments, the main entrance gate, and the neglected state of Aziz Khan Road.

During his visit, a high-level meeting was held where residents and complainants highlighted civic problems, including snake and mosquito infestations, water issues, absence of street carpeting, low-voltage electricity, open sewers, unsafe wiring, overgrown grass that poses dengue risks, and a malfunctioning sewage system.

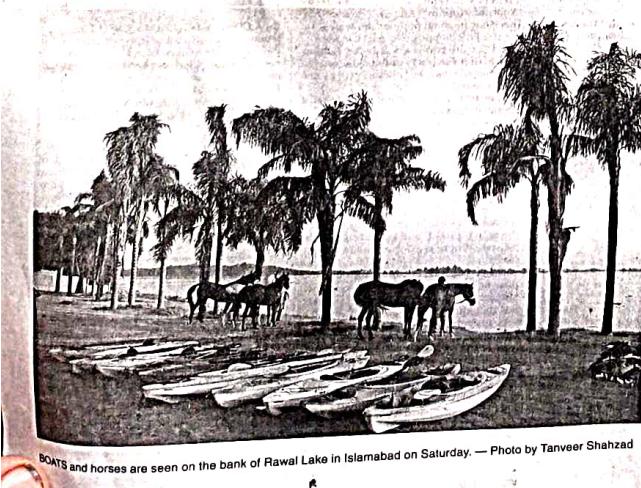
Ms Murtaza assured residents and allottees that RDA is fully committed to resolving these issues. She ordered the immediate demarcation and recovery of amenity plots, including those

designated for mosques, playgrounds, parks, and schools, from the developer. Additionally, she instructed that the Layout Plan (LoP) be cleared of all encroachments.

She stated that no LoP or revised LoP would be issued to the sponsor. Legal measures, including arrest and disqualification of the developer, will be considered in accordance with the law.

Key stakeholders, including residents' representatives, the core committee, and officials of the developer, such as the Director of Estate Management, Director of Engineering, Director of MP & DP, Director of Planning, Inspector General of Police, and others, participated in the meeting.

The RDA reaffirmed its commitment to safeguarding citizens' rights and ensuring that all housing schemes operate strictly within approved legal frameworks.



BOATS and horses are seen on the bank of Rawal Lake in Islamabad on Saturday. — Photo by Tanveer Shahzad

Blast at Russian gunpowder factory kills 11

MOSCOW: At least 11 people were killed and dozens more injured in a factory blast in a Russian region outside Moscow, Russian authorities said on Saturday.

Russian state officials said the blast took place at a factory in the Ryazan region, with independent media sources reporting it was a gunpowder plant. Russian emergency officials said they were working around the clock to clear the damage.

"Unfortunately, 11 people were killed," the emergency situations ministry said on social media, publishing photographs of debris and severe damage to a building.

It added that 130 people were injured in the blast.

According to independent media reports, the explosion happened at the Elastik gunpowder and ammunition factory. In 2021, a blast at the same plant killed 17 people.

Local authorities in the

Ryazan region announced a day of mourning. "A tragic event has occurred on the territory of the whole region," Ryazan Governor Pavel Malkov said on Telegram. Fatal factory accidents are not uncommon in Russia.

In a statement on Telegram, the ministry said rescuers were continuing to search through rubble at the scene of the blast, 320km (198 miles) southeast of Moscow.

Ryazan region governor Pavel Malkov said that the incident had been triggered by a fire breaking out inside a workshop at the factory.

There was no cause given for the fire, nor was it clear what the factory produced. Ukrainian drones have previously targeted military and economic infrastructure in Ryazan region. Some Russian media outlets reported that the explosion was caused by gunpowder catching fire.

—Agencies

Air Canada grounds hundreds of flights over strike

TORONTO: Air Canada cancelled hundreds of flights on Saturday as it began shutting down operations in response to a strike by flight attendants — triggering summer travel chaos for its 130,000 daily passengers.

Canada's largest airline, which flies directly to 180 cities worldwide, urged customers not to go to the airport if they have a ticket for Air Canada or its low-cost subsidiary Air Canada Rouge.

It said flights by Air Canada Express, which are operated by a third party, would not be impacted by the walkout. "Air Canada deeply regrets the effect the strike is having on customers," the company said in a statement.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), which represents Air Canada's 10,000 flight attendants, said that strike action officially began at 12:58 am local time (0458 GMT) on Saturday.

In response, Air Canada began a "lockout" of cabin crew beginning to prevent employees from working during the standoff fuelled by a payment dispute. Air Canada had been gradually winding down operations ahead of the possible labor action.

As of 8pm Friday, the airline said it had cancelled 623 flights affecting more than 100,000 passengers. Its full 700-flight daily schedule has been scrapped for Saturday. "At this time, Air Canada remains engaged and committed to negotiate a renewal to its collective agreement with CUPE," it said. —AFP



BJERNDRUP: Wreckage lies at the site a day after a train derailed in Denmark's Jutland region on Friday. The express train hit a farm truck, killing one person and injuring 27. According to police, it was travelling at a "relatively high speed" when the collision happened. —Reuters

Moscow claims taking more villages; Kyiv says it repulsed attack

Drone attack in Kursk region kills two people in their car

KYIV: Russian forces said on Saturday they had captured two more villages in eastern Ukraine while Kyiv said it was pushing back a rapid Russian advance that had pierced through its defences.

In Russia, Kursk region governor Alexander Khleinstein said a Ukrainian drone had struck in the district of Rybachye and killed two people in their car, their 13-year-old son.

The latest developments in the war came hours after US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin held talks on ending the conflict, with few results.

The Ukrainian army, smaller and less equipped than Russia's, has been on the defensive for months as Russian forces advance slowly.

Russia's defence ministry said its troops had taken the village of Kolodzhyne in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region and the village of

Voronezh in the neighbouring Dniproptetrovsk region.

Ukraine claims

Kyiv and Ukrainian military analysts from the website Deepstate did not confirm the advances. Russian troops earlier this week broke through Ukrainian lines in one part of the Donetsk region near the town of Dobropolina, close to an important road connecting key cities in the area.

Ukraine said it sent reinforcements and claimed to have taken six villages.

"For a second consecutive day we have been successful in extremely difficult sectors in the Dniproptetrovsk and Pokrovsk directions," Zelensky said on social media on Saturday.

"The destruction of occupiers who tried to infiltrate deeper into our lands is progressing well," adding that Ukraine had also captured an "important" number of Russian POWs. Zelensky also repeated his warnings about possible further Russian attacks "in the coming days".

"The Russian army may try to increase pressure and strikes against Ukrainian positions in

order to create more favorable political circumstances for talks with global actors," he said.

Russia launched 85 attack drones and a ballistic missile at Ukraine overnight, Kyiv said, after the Putin-Trump talks in Alaska.

The highly anticipated meeting in the remote US state ended with no breakthrough in halting Russia's more than three-year-long Ukraine invasion.

Ukraine's air force said Moscow had "attacked with an Iskander-M ballistic missile and 85 Shahed-136" drones, while also attacking "frontline areas" in four regions.

In its daily report, the air force said the attacks took place "on the night of August 16" and starting in the evening of August 15 — when Putin and Trump held their negotiations. Kyiv said its air defence shot down 16 of the drones.

Russia has breached into Ukraine's territory for almost 3.5 years, occupying large swathes of the east and south of the country. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, launched by Putin in February 2022, has killed thousands. —AFP

Trump says China won't invade Taiwan while he is president

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said on Friday that Chinese President Xi Jinping told him China would not invade Taiwan while Trump is in office.

Trump made the comments in an interview with Fox News, ahead of talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

"I will tell you, you know, you have a very similar thing with President Xi Jinping," Trump said. "I don't believe there's any way it's going to happen as long as I'm here. We'll see," Trump said during an interview on Fox News' "Special Report."

"He told me, 'I will never do it as long as you're president.' President Xi told me that, and I said, 'Well, I appreciate that,' but I also said, 'But I am very patient, and China is very patient,'" Trump said.

Trump and Xi held their first confirmed call of Trump's second presidential term in June. Trump

also said in April that Xi had called him but did not specify when that call took place.

China views Taiwan as its own territory and has vowed to "reunify" with the democratic and separately governed island, by force if necessary. Taiwan strongly objects to China's sovereignty claims.

The Chinese Embassy in Washington said the topic of Taiwan as "the most important issue" in China-US relations.

"The US government should adhere to the one-China principle and the three US-China joint communiques, handle cross-sensitivity issues prudently, and earnestly safeguard China-US relations and peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu said in a statement.

Although Washington is Taiwan's main arms supplier and international backer, the US — like most countries — has no formal diplomatic ties with the island. —Reuters

Hurricane continues to intensify in Caribbean

WASHINGTON: Hurricane Erin on Saturday strengthened to a "catastrophic" Category 5 storm as it barreled towards the Caribbean with weather officials warning of possible flash floods and landslides.

The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said in its latest report the storm's maximum sustained winds had increased to 160 miles (255 kilometers) per hour by 11:20am (1520 GMT).

Erin, the first hurricane of the Atlantic season this year, had peaked about 105 miles (170 kilometers) northeast of Anguilla in the northern Leeward Islands, an area that includes the US and British Virgin Islands. "Erin is now a catastrophic Category 5 hurricane," the NHC said.

Tropical storm watches remained in effect for St Martin, St Barthelemy and Sint Maarten. The hurricane's center is expected to move over the weekend just north of the British Leeward Islands, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

The storm could drench the islands with as much as six inches (15 centimeters) of rain in isolated areas, the NHC said.

"Continued rapid strengthening is expected today, followed by fluctuations in intensity through the weekend," the agency said in an earlier report. It also warned of "locally considerable flash and urban flooding, along with landslides or mudslides." —AFP

DC police chief remains in command under deal with Trump admin

WASHINGTON: District of Columbia officials and the US Justice Department agreed a deal under the urging of a federal judge on Friday that scales back President Donald Trump's attempted takeover of the capital city's police force.

Under the accord presented by the two sides to US District Judge Anna Reyer, Trump administration lawyers conceded that DC Mayor Muriel Bowser's appointed police chief, Pamela Smith, would remain in command of the Washington Metropolitan Police Department.

The precise role of Drug

Enforcement Administration head Terry Cole, who had been named by US Attorney General Pam Bondi as the city's "emergency police commissioner" under Trump's takeover bid, was still to be hashed out in negotiations.

The two sides opened talks on Friday afternoon at Reyer's insistence, after a hearing before the judge on a lawsuit brought by the city challenging Trump's unprecedented move to assume full control of city law enforcement, invoking an emergency clause of the district's 50-year-old plus home rule charter.

The lawsuit sought a federal court

ruling to block the takeover as illegal, according to DC Attorney General Brian Schwalb. During oral arguments on Friday, Reyer expressed scepticism that the Trump administration has legal authority to run the city's police force or that Cole can effectively take charge of the department as its chief.

"I still do not understand on what basis the president, through the attorney general, through Mr Cole, can say: 'You, police department, can do anything unless I say you can,'" Reyer told a Justice Department lawyer. Abigail

Jackson, a White House spokeswoman, said in a statement before the hearing: "The Trump administration has the lawful authority to assert control over the DC police, which is necessary due to the emergency that has arisen on our nation's capital as a result of [Cole's] leadership."

Trump said on Monday he was

deploying hundreds of National Guard troops to Washington and temporarily taking over the city's police department to curb what he has depicted as a crime emergency in the US capital. Statistics show that violent crime shot up in 2023 but has been rapidly declining since. Federal law enforcement agencies, including the FBI and the DEA, have deployed agents to patrol the streets and carry out arrests. On Thursday, US Attorney General Pam Bondi issued an order transferring control of the police department from the city to the DEA's Cole.

Trump, who has suggested he could take similar actions in other Democratic-controlled cities, has sought to expand the presidency in his second term, inserting himself into the affairs of major banks, law firms and elite universities.

Friday's lawsuit, which names Trump, Bondi, Cole, and others as defendants, intensified a growing battle over the city between Bondi and Bowser, who have emerged as the public faces of the power struggle.

Bondi's order had stipulated that the city must receive approval from Cole before it can issue any directives to the roughly 3,500-member police force. It also sought to rescind several of the police department's prior directives, including ones that addressed its level of involvement with federal immigration enforcement. —Reuters



CONTEPEC: An agricultural drone, loaded with seeds of tejoctope, pine and oak as part of a reforestation programme for areas destroyed by wildfires, flies in Mexico's Michoacan state. —AFP



Federal safety net fraying in Michigan's cherry country

CENTRAL LAKE: Weather has damaged much of the family orchards crop for the third time in five years. The blow landed on a farm and an industry already squeezed by the Trump administration's changes to immigration services, immigrant trade policies.

King Orchards' harvest crew from Guatemala arrived in mid-July, short-handed and weeks late after delays in securing the US-HA seasonal farmworker visas they rely on each year. They paid more to hire local workers, and waited after a US Postal Service reorganization left fresh fruit sitting a bit too long.

A US Department of Agriculture grant request for funding a cold-storage unit remained in limbo, as Washington spending on farm programs and agricultural research. And Jack King, Juliette's brother and the farm's agronomist, kept searching for fertilizer cheap enough to haul and untouched by President Donald Trump's trade wars.

"It all slows us down," King McAvoy, the farm's business manager, said during

a brief pause in July's harried harvest. Farmers in the hills near Grand Traverse Bay, where the fruit of their labor has filled pies and fed generations, said they are caught in the crosshairs of Trump's trade and immigration policies, with sharp cuts and increasing delays hitting the \$227 million US tart cherry industry hard. From weather, plant disease and pests woes, USDA forecast Michigan will lose 41pc of its tart cherry crop this year, compared to 2022. Northwest Michigan, where the King family located, faces the steepest drop about 70pc, according to the Cherry Industry Administrative Board.

After the April freeze, King McAvoy's plan was to bring in his friend and fellow grower, Emilio Matto, in Suttons Bay, Michigan. "What are you?" Juliette stared at the tree. "I'm not good." South of the Kings, the cold snap left farmer Don Gallagher's trees sparse. "We can grow leaves," he said, as his family hunted for fruit in the branches. "We just can't grow cherries." —Reuters



VILLARDEVOS: Forest firefighters tackle a wildfire as a plane drops water over a Spanish village. Spain, now in its third week under a heatwave alert, is still battling wildfires raging in the northwest and west of the country, where the army has been deployed to help contain the blazes. —AFP



LAMPEDUSA: Migrants flash the peace sign as they sit in a Red Cross vehicle after disembarking on this Italian island following their rescue from boats in the Mediterranean Sea. —AFP



PONGYANG: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un watches a performance by a Russian art mission on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japan. With him is Vyacheslav Volodin, speaker of Russia's State Duma (parliament). —AFP

US stops visitor visas for people from Gaza

Young woman flown to Italy for treatment dies

WASHINGTON: The US State Department on Saturday said it was halting all visitor visas for individuals from Gaza while it conducts "a full and thorough" review.

The department said "a small number" of temporary medical humanitarian visas had been issued in recent days but did not provide a figure.

The US issued more than 3,800 B1/B2 visitor visas, which permit foreigners to seek medical treatment in the United States, to holders of the Palestinian Authority travel document, according to an analysis of monthly figures provided on the

department's website. That figure includes 640 visas issued in May.

The State Department's move to stop visitor visas for people from Gaza comes after Laura Loomer, a flight attendant and employee of President Donald Trump, said on social media on Friday that the Palestinian "refugees" had entered the US this month.

Loomer's statement sparked outrage among some Republicans, with US Representative Chip Roy calling for Congress to inquire about the matter and Representative Randy Fine, of Florida, describing it as a "national security risk".

The US has not indicated that it would accept Palestinians displaced by the war. However, sources said that Saudi, Sudan and Israel are discussing a plan

to resettle Palestinians.

Gaza woman dies in Italy

A young Palestinian woman with severe wasting who was flown from Gaza to Italy this week for treatment has died, the hospital said on Saturday.

The 20-year-old, named by Italian media as Marah Abu Zubri, arrived in Pisa on an Italian government humanitarian flight overnight Wednesday. She had a "very complex clinical picture" and was "in a profound state of organic wasting", the University Hospital of Pisa said.

On Friday, after undergoing tests and starting treatment, she had suffered respiratory distress and cardiac arrest and died. The hospital did not elaborate on her condition, but Italian news

agencies reported that she was suffering from severe malnutrition.

Humanitarian groups, UN agencies and Hamas have warned of the risk of widespread famine in war-tattered Gaza.

The young woman had come to Italy with her mother and two of three Italian air force flights that arrived this week with a total of 31 patients and their companions. All suffered from serious congenital diseases, wounds or amputations, the Italian foreign ministry said at the time.

So far for more than 180 children and young people from Gaza have been brought to Italy since the war began between Israel and Hamas.

The head of the Tuscany region, Eugenio Gianni, offered his condolences to the young woman's family.—Agencies

Syrian Druze call for right to self-determination

Demonstrators wave Israeli flags at Sweida's main square

SWEIDA: Hundreds demonstrated in Syria's Sweida on Saturday, denouncing last month's sectarian violence and calling for the right to self-determination for the Druze-majority province, a correspondent reports.

A week of clashes between Druze fighters and Bedouins, but rapidly escalated, drawing in government forces and volunteers from other parts of Syria.

Syrian authorities have said their forces were sent to stop the clashes, but witnesses, Druze associations and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights have accused them of siding with the Bedouin and committing abuses against the Druze, including summary executions. The Observatory has said the violence killed some 1,600 people,

many of them Druze civilians. In one of Sweida's main squares, some demonstrators waved the Israeli flag, the correspondent reported.

Israel, which has its own Druze community, bombed government forces during last month's violence, saying it was acting to defend the minority group as well as enforce its demands for the demilitarisation of southern Syria.

Other protesters chanted "free freedom and Jolani ou!", referring to Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharqia, whose nom de guerre as an Islamist rebel commander was Abu Mohammed al-Jolani.

Some held placards, one reading "the right to self-determination is a sacred right in Sweida", while another demanded aid corridor from neighbouring Jordan.

"Today Sweida has taken a stand... under the slogan of the right to self-determination," resident Munif Rashid, 51, said.

"This is Sweida's position today, and no one can blame it because the

assault it faced was not normal." A live broadcast by the Suwayda 24 news outlet showed a woman telling the applauding crowd: "We do not want self-administration or federal rule, we want full independence."

Demonstrator Mustafa Sehnaoui, who said he was a US-Syrian dual national, said: "We've been under siege for more than one month, and all our international community... to open a safe corridor." Residents have accused the government of imposing a blockade, something officials have denied, pointing to the entry of several aid convoys.

State media said another convoy was due to arrive on Saturday.

But the Observatory said the main Damascus-Sweida highway was still cut, accusing armed groups linked to the government of blocking the resumption of normal trade.

Last month, authorities announced the formation of a committee to investigate the Sweida violence.—AFP

Policeman killed in clash with Iranian fighters

TEHRAN: Gunmen in Iran's volatile southeast killed a police officer in a shooting with security forces, news agencies reported on Saturday, with a fighter group claiming the attack.

The clash occurred in Sistan-Baluchestan province, one of the country's poorest regions, amid a scene of frequent violence between the security forces and Baluchi minority rebels. Sunni groups and drug traffickers.

"In an exchange of fire... between Iranian police and rebels, one police officer was wounded and another killed," the Fars news agency said, citing the police.

The ISNA news agency also reported the deadly

Sistan-Baluchestan is home to a large ethnic Baluchi population, most of whom are Sunni Muslims, in contrast to Iran's Shia majority.

Fars said the assailants were killed in the fire-fight, but the scene and were being pursued—possibly by police. Later on social media, the Sunni group Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice) claimed responsibility for the attack.

In April, the group carried out an attack in Sistan-Baluchestan that killed a police officer, according to media reports. On July 26, at least six people were killed in an attack claimed by Jaish al-Adl on a courthouse in the same province.—AFP



PEOPLE shout slogans as demonstrators from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign call for an arms embargo on Britain's weapons exports to Israel at RAF High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire—Reuters

Australia grants asylum to former Hong Kong lawmaker

HONG KONG: Hong Kong pro-democracy activist Ted Hui has been granted asylum in Australia, the former legislator announced in a Facebook post on Saturday.

"If it weren't for political persecution, I would never have thought of living in a foreign land. Immigrants can always return to their homes to visit relatives at any time; Exiles have no home," The Home Affairs Department said it had immediately responded to emailed questions sent after business hours.

The Hong Kong government and China's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to questions about the decision.

"When people around me say 'congratulations' to me, although I didn't feel that when I left, I can't help but feel sick in my heart. How to congratulate a political refugee who

misses his hometown?" Hui said in the Facebook post.

A former Democratic Party lawmaker, Hui left Hong Kong late 2020 after facing criminal charges over the 2019 pro-democracy protests.

Ji in 2023 Hong Kong accused him and seven others of national security offences, including incitement to secession, and put HK\$1 million (\$127,782) bounties on their heads. Australia said it was disappointed by the decision at the time and concerned about the law.

Pro-democracy businessman Jimmy Lai is currently on trial in Hong Kong on charges related to a national security law imposed by Beijing and alleged sedition.—Reuters

Majority of Americans think alcohol is bad for health

WASHINGTON: A narrow majority of Americans now believe even moderate consumption of alcohol negatively affects health, as US drinking levels continue to decline, according to a recent survey.

Pollster Gallup found the number of Americans who said they drink alcohol to be an all-time low since the poll was first conducted in 1939 — a few years after the United States ended its prohibition of alcohol's health effects.

The survey found 54 percent of Americans reported they drank alcohol either occasionally or regularly in 2025, down from at least 60pc recorded between 1997 and 2023.

Those who did drink drank alcohol less often in smaller amounts, with the average number of drinks consumed in the last week being 2.8, the lowest figure Gallup has recorded since 1996, "the pollster said on its website.

Attitudes towards alcohol, which Gallup has been tracking since 2001,

saw the most significant difference in the poll published this week.

The number of people who consider moderate consumption of alcohol up to one or two drinks per day — to be bad for personal health rose to 53pc in 2025. For comparison, the figure was 27pc in the year 2000.

"Americans' drinking habits are shifting amid the medical world's reappraisal of alcohol's health effects," the pollster noted.

In January, then-US surgeon general Vivek Murthy called for alcohol to be sold with a cancer warning label on its packaging.

"Alcohol is a well-established, preventable cause of cancer, responsible for about 100,000 cancer cases and 20,000 cancer deaths annually in the United States," he said in a statement.

"Yet the majority of Americans are unaware of this risk," he added, underscoring the urgent need for public education.—AFP



OCHOPEE (Florida, US): People attend Irish priest Father Frank O'Loughlin's Diamond Jubilee Mass in solidarity with detained immigrants outside the detention centre known as 'Alligator Alcatraz'—AFP

Bolsonaro leaves house arrest for medical exams

BRASILIA: Brazil's ex-president Jair Bolsonaro left his home where he is under house arrest to undergo medical exams on Saturday, weeks before the Supreme Court rules whether he is guilty of plotting a coup.

The right-wing politician is accused of attempting to hold onto power despite his 2022 electoral defeat by Brazil's current leftist leader, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Bolsonaro, 70, has been under house arrest since early March for violating a judicial order on using social networks to plead his case to the public.

A judge agreed to temporarily lift that measure so he could get medical attention for what Bolsonaro's attorneys said were gastrointestinal problems resulting from a 2018 stabbing attack while he campaigned for president.

In particular, their request noted his chronic "reflux and hiccup symptoms" and need to go to hospital for tests, including an intestinal endoscopy. Bolsonaro arrived on Saturday morning at a medical center in the capital Brasília, where he briefly greeted around 20 sup-

porters waiting for him outside with Brazilian, Israeli and US flags.

"We believe that Jair Bolsonaro will be president of Brazil again," Marcia Bolsonaro, his daughter, told reporters outside the hospital, adding: "The people demand it." The former president did not address journalists who were also gathered.

Bolsonaro was permitted by the court to remain in hospital for eight hours before returning to his Brasília residence.

Brazil's Supreme Court will begin deciding on Sept 2 on the coup attempt charges against Bolsonaro, who led Latin America's largest country from 2019 to 2022.

He faces up to 40 years in prison if found guilty.

Bolsonaro has maintained his innocence and earned support from US President Donald Trump, who has called the trial a "witch hunt." Citing Bolsonaro's "politically motivated persecution," Trump has signed an executive order slapping 50 percent tariffs on many Brazilian imports.—AFP

Paramilitary forces' shelling kills 17 in besieged Sudan city

PORT SUDAN: Sudanese paramilitary forces shelled North Darfur's besieged capital El-Fasher on Saturday, killing at least 17 civilians and injuring 25 others, a medical source said.

The source at El-Fasher hospital said those numbers only account for those who reached the hospital, adding that others were buried by their families unable to access medical centres due to ongoing security challenges.

Since May last year, El-Fasher has been under siege by paramilitaries. Rapid Support Forces (RSF) which have been battling Sudan's army since April 2023.

According to the local resistance committee — one of hundreds of volunteer groups documenting atrocities during the conflict — the attack involved heavy artillery shelling by the RSF across several residential neighborhoods.

The bombardment began on Saturday and continued well into the afternoon, the committee said, describing the assault as one of the deadliest recent attacks on the city, resulting in numerous casualties and severe damage to property and infrastructure.

A few kilometres to the north, paramilitaries also shelled the famine-stricken Abu Shouk displacement camp, killing several

civilians including a community leader and injuring at least 20 people, according to the camp's Emergency Response Room, which is coordinating frontline aid throughout the war.

Following the RSF's loss of Sudan's capital, Khartoum, to the army in March, El-Fasher and nearby displacement camps have been targeted in renewed attacks.

In April, major RSF offensives on the northern Malakal camp, where many who sought refuge in El-Fasher, were repelled.

The ongoing war between Sudan's army and the RSF has killed tens of thousands, displaced millions and triggered what the United Nations calls the world's largest displacement and hunger crisis.

Malnutrition, cholera and flooding have affected the country, with the UN reporting that nearly 40 percent of children under five in El-Fasher are now acutely malnourished, with 11 percent suffering from severe acute malnutrition, according to UN figures.

Malnutrition has already claimed 63 lives — mostly women and children — in just one week in El-Fasher, a senior health official said last week.

The conflict has effectively divided the country, with the army controlling the north, east and centre while the RSF holds much of Darfur and parts of the south.

Last year, famine was declared in three camps near El-Fasher, including Abu Shouk and Zamzam. The UN has warned the crisis would extend into the city itself by last May, although a lack of data has so far prevented an official famine declaration.

This month, the World Food Programme

(WFP) said thousands of families trapped in El-Fasher are at "risk of starvation".

As a result, food rations for staple foods like sorghum and wheat — made to make traditional flatbreads and porridge — are up to 460 percent higher in El-Fasher compared to other parts of Sudan.

Markets and clinics have been attacked while community kitchens that once fed displaced families have largely shut down due to a lack of supplies, the UN agency added.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said on Thursday that Sudan is experiencing its worst cholera epidemic in years, fuelled by the ongoing conflict.—AFP

Tight security for Libya local vote marred by violence

TRIPOLI: Hundreds of thousands of Libyans voted on Saturday in municipal elections held under tight security after incidents of severe polling station delays.

The elections are seen as a test of democracy in a nation still plagued by division and instability since the Nato-backed uprising that toppled long-time leader Moamer Kadafi in 2011.

Polling took place in around 50 municipalities, including the capital Tripoli. A heavy police presence was deployed in the Tripoli-based urban areas, including the Tripoli-Tajuri area, where it is crucial for me because it makes me feel useful," said Sami el-Tajuri, a 62-year-old architect, adding that his three children are voting for the first time.

"It's frustrating to see that I can

have my say in who will represent me but so many other Libyans, especially in the east, can't."

Holds in voter card distribution

Since Qadhafi's overthrow, Libya has been split between the UN-recognised government in Tripoli, led by Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah, and its eastern rival, backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar. Elections were initially scheduled in 63 municipalities across the west and 13 in the east and nine in the south.

But the National Election Commission (NEC) suspended elections in 11 municipalities, mostly in Haftar-controlled areas, due to "irregularities", including unauthorised halls in voter card distribution.

On Saturday, the commission announced the postponement to

August 23 of elections in seven more municipalities, mostly in the west, including four in the Zawiya area, as well as Surman and Sabratha.

The delays followed Friday arson attacks on polling stations in Zawiya and Sabratha.

On Saturday, the NEC said that 10 Zliten, some 160 kilometres (100 miles) east of Tripoli, and 10 Misrata, north of Tripoli, would postpone the election until Aug 27.

Such "criminal acts" represent another grave assault on the elec-

tion process and a blatant attempt to disenfranchise citizens, undermine their right to choose their representatives, and obstruct the democratic process," the mission added.

For Tripoli resident Esra Abdellatif, 36, a mother of three, the municipal elections were "very important" because they determine who would manage government-allocated funds.

After Qadhafi's overthrow, Libya held its first freely contested elections in 2012 for the 200 members of the General National Congress. That was followed by nationwide municipal elections in June 2014, and legislative polls in June 2016, which were marred by renewed violence and very low turnout.

In some western municipalities, residents are voting in a local election for the first time since 2014.—AFP





Pakistani women in UK face strong barriers to earning

Greater London Authority study explores causes of high unemployment rate, gender gap

By Atika Rehman

LONDON: Pakistani women in London face the highest barriers to secure paid work among all ethnic groups, despite high levels of education, according to a new report commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA).

The study titled "Bangladeshi and Pakistani Women in Good Work" warns that women from these communities are disproportionately excluded from meaningful employment due to discrimination, pay gaps, inequalities and inflexible workplaces.

Numbers paint a dismal picture. In 2022, almost half of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in London (48.1pc) were economically inactive, compared to just 15.3pc of men from the same background. Their unemployment rate stood at 16.6pc, which is three times higher than men's 5.5pc. The most alarming is the gender pay gap. Pakistani women in London earn on average 60pc less than men, the widest disparity of any ethnic group.

Calling the findings "shocking", London's Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard, said it is unacceptable that "as experienced Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are still being passed over for promotions, or feel compelled to change their names to secure interviews. These stories reveal the resilience of these women, but also the urgency of dismantling the barriers that hold them back."

The report also includes interviews with 32 women who spoke about their frustration but also determination.

One solicitor described the financial hurdles she faced trying to qualify: "Now the LPC [legal practice course] costs £14,000. I was saving really hard to do that. I had a friend who's a taxi driver, they just looked at me blankly. For others it was easy – their parents could just pay," said one account

who identified herself as Khadeja, a British Pakistani who is 30 years old. Others spoke of being overlooked at work despite clear capability. "Last year, there was a position that came up, but they didn't give it to my colleague, who had over 10 years of experience. Instead, they gave it to a White woman who couldn't make the team. My Bengali colleague still does everything," said Farzana, a British Bangladeshi community worker.

Farzana, a Pakistani teacher who moved to London two years ago, added: "I went for an interview and they told me my accent would confuse students. They said our accents were not matching."

Another barrier is discrimination related to visibly Muslim identities. "Many times when we wear hijab, they treat us differently, like can she really work? Can she even speak?" said Mahmuda, a Bangladeshi volunteer, whose words mirror the experiences of many Pakistani women.

Balancing family responsibilities with careers also weighs heavily. Affordable childcare emerged as a key demand. "If I put my children into childcare, so I could do a longer working day, most of my pay would go towards it. It's not feasible," said Zayna, a British Bangladeshi administrator.

Despite these obstacles, many women display resilience. One Pakistani policy manager, Anisa, said she only got her start through a diversity internship: "Otherwise, I wouldn't really be here. The field is very White and very elite." She report calls for urgent reforms such as blind recruitment, recognition of overseas qualifications, affordable childcare as well as targeted progression schemes for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women.

"Economic growth and reducing inequality must go hand in hand, so no community is left behind," Dr Weekes-Bernard said. "We must lead resolute efforts to build inclusive workplaces that reflect London's diversity."

The testimonies of Pakistani women reveal the depth of the challenges. As one participant summed up: "We are qualified, we are capable, but we are not seen in the higher positions. It feels like the glass ceiling is even thicker for us."

Zelensky under pressure as Trump pushes for peace deal, not just truce

After phone conversation, both leaders are expected to meet in Washington tomorrow to discuss details

we will then schedule a meeting with President Putin".

Trump invited Zelensky to Washington after meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska. The meeting did not produce the expected ceasefire, but the US president offered a rapid, full-fledged peace deal, instead of truce, putting the onus on Kyiv.

"Russia is a very big power, and they're not," Trump said, bluntly framing his expectation that Ukraine should make a deal.

The talks will place Ukrainian president in a precarious position as he returns to Washington for the first time since a February Oval Office meeting with Trump descended into acrimony.

Trump's push for a peace agreement before a truce defies months of diplomacy by Ukraine and its European allies, who have insisted that a ceasefire must be the first step. "It was determined by all that the

best way to end the horrific war between Russia and Ukraine is to go directly to a peace agreement, which would end the war, and not a mere ceasefire agreement, which often times do not hold up," Trump posted on Truth Social.

Security guarantee

As Kyiv braces for the diplomatic pressure, European allies said a key part of the talks involved new, robust security guarantees for Ukraine to prevent future Russian invasions.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said the most interesting element of the meeting from the Trump-Putin summit concerned NATO-style security proposals.

"The starting point of the proposal is the definition of a collective security clause that would allow Ukraine to benefit from the support of all its partners, including the US, ready to

take action in case it is attacked again," she said.

Two sources familiar with the matter said European leaders and Trump discussed potential guarantees for Ukraine similar to the Nato alliance's mutual support pledge, which states that an attack on one is an attack on all.

Trump calls Zelensky

In a phone call, Trump briefed Zelensky on his talks with Putin.

A source familiar with the conversation said Trump told the Ukrainian leader that Putin had offered to freeze most front lines if Kyiv's forces fully withdrew from the eastern Donets and Luhansk regions.

But Zelensky rejected the demand. On the other hand, "the impression is he was a fast deal at any price," the source said.

British Prime Minister Keir

Starmer said an end to the war was closer thanks to Trump, but added, "until (Putin) stops his barbaric assault, we will keep tightening the screws on his war machine with even more sanctions."

A senior European commentator from a major think tank said: "Ukraine must have iron-clad security guarantees and that no limits should be placed on its right to seek NATO membership."

Some European commentators were more critical.

"We got no honest carpet treatment with Trump, while Trump got nothing. As feared, no ceasefire, no peace," Wolfgang Ischinger, former German ambassador to Washington, posted on the social media site X.

"A clear 1-0 for Putin." As the summit concluded, Trump told Putin, "We'll speak to you very soon and probably see you again very soon." —Agencies

ATTENT

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Four years on from the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021, the optimism surrounding what was being hailed as a geopolitical victory for Pakistan has vanished. Instead, Pakistan is contending with a rising wave of militant violence from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Balochistan, and which threatens to expand inland. What options does Islamabad have to rethink its Afghan strategy?

RETHINKING THE TALIBAN DOCTRINE



Taliban security personnel gather at the site two days after air strikes by Pakistan in the Barmal district of Afghanistan's eastern Paktika province on December 26, 2024. Pakistani security officials said the bombardment had targeted "terrorist hideouts": with violence escalating in KP, Islamabad may soon be forced to abandon limited, intelligence-led crackdowns in favour of sustained, large-scale military campaigns | AFP

By Zia Ur Rehman

Just one month before the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in August 2021, a closed-door discussion organised by an Islamabad-based security think-tank brought together regional experts, retired military officers and policymakers to assess the potential fallout of the Taliban's rapid territorial gains in Afghanistan amid the US military withdrawal.

While many participants expressed concern over a looming security vacuum and its likely spillover into Pakistan, a few struck a markedly optimistic tone. Among them was a retired senior military official who declared confidently: "The good days are returning. The Delhi-leaning set-up in Kabul is on its way out. With the Taliban back in charge, all Islamabad needs to do is press for the closure of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan [TTP] and Baloch separatist sanctuaries in eastern Afghanistan, and the Taliban will comply. They owe us."

He was not alone. Across Pakistan's political and security establishment, the Taliban's return in August 2021 was initially greeted with a cautious but clear sense of opportunity. A friendly regime in Kabul appeared to serve Islamabad's long-standing strategic goals: rolling back Indian influence, reducing Western presence and restoring Pakistan's central role in shaping regional outcomes.

Then-prime minister Imran Khan hailed the moment as the breaking of "the shackles of slavery". Then-interior minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed, speaking triumphantly at the Torkham border crossing, predicted the rise of "a new bloc" that would elevate the region's global significance. Even Khawaja Muhammad Asif, then in opposition and now defence minister, posted a photograph of Taliban leader Mullah Baradar alongside US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, captioned: "You may have the power, but God is with us. Allah-o-Akbar".

Four years later, that optimism has all but vanished. As Afghanistan slips from international headlines, Pakistan faces mounting costs from what was once heralded as a strategic win. Instead of securing its western frontier, the worsening security situation has led to a resumption of militant violence, a worsening security climate and a strained relationship with a regime it once considered an ally.

Drawing on recent fieldwork in both countries, this article examines how the Taliban's return has deepened Pakistan's domestic security crises, exposing the limits of its longstanding strategic assumptions.

ACROSS THE BORDER, VIOLENCE RISES AGAIN

For the political and religious elders of Bajaur, the stakes could not have been higher. With the government poised to launch a new counterterrorism

operation in the district bordering Afghanistan against the TTP and the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) — the local affiliate of the transnational Islamic State network — they took it upon themselves to negotiate a peaceful resolution through a *jirga*.

Their appeal to local TTP commanders was straightforward: either retreat into Afghanistan or relocate to remote mountainous areas to engage security forces. Such a move, they argued, would spare civilian populations from the destruction, displacement and the fear that inevitably follow armed conflict in villages.

Yet the militants, sensing a shift in regional power dynamics, refused.

Emboldened by the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan, the TTP leaders, according to a participant in the *jirga*, demanded terms that Pakistan could never accept. The talks collapsed, making renewed conflict all but inevitable. The renewed military operation was launched on August 11.

The Taliban's triumph in Kabul has emboldened militant groups across Pakistan's western belt. Alongside the TTP, groups such as the Haiz Gul Bahadur faction in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Baloch ethno-separatist organisations such as the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) have exploited the shifting regional balance to intensify their insurgencies against the Pakistani state.

ISKP — previously weakened by crackdowns by the US, the former Afghan government, and the Taliban — has also been reinvigorated since the Taliban's takeover. After facing sustained pressure from the Taliban inside Afghanistan, some ISKP fighters crossed into Pakistan, particularly into Bajaur, where the group has since carried out several high-profile attacks.

The release of this year's Global Terrorism Index (GTI) by the Institute for Economics and Peace think-tank coincided with an attempted hijacking of the Jaffer Express passenger train in Balochistan by BLA militants in March, an incident that drew international attention.

According to the GTI, Pakistan is now ranked as the world's second most terrorism-affected country, after Burkina Faso, a name unfamiliar to many Pakistanis. The report also highlighted a troubling reality: three Pakistani militant groups, the TTP, the BLA and the ISKP, are among the world's 10 deadliest terrorist organisations, posing a formidable challenge to Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy.

Findings from the GTI, corroborated by statistics from law enforcement agencies and other security research organisations, indicate that Pakistan has witnessed a sharp escalation in terrorism since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021. In the years since, the country has faced a renewed wave of attacks, including suicide bombings, targeted assassinations, and complex assaults on military installations, political gatherings and mosques.

RESURGENCE OF MILITANT GROUPS

Until 2020, militant outfits such as the TTP and the Haiz Gul Bahadur group were under sustained pressure from multiple fronts. Pakistan's large-scale counterterrorism campaigns, including Operation Zarb-i-Azb launched in 2014, inflicted heavy losses on their ranks. Internal divisions further weakened these groups, while US drone strikes eliminated much of their senior leadership. By that period, many TTP factions had either gone dormant or dispersed into Afghanistan's eastern provinces, including Khost, Kunar and Nangarhar.

In Balochistan, too, attacks by the BLA and other major separatist organisations had declined, due to a persistent security crackdown and internal splintering.

However, the US-Taliban peace talks in Doha and the subsequent American withdrawal from Afghanistan breathed new life into Pakistani militant groups, particularly the TTP. The anticipation of a Taliban victory triggered a wave of reunifications among previously fragmented TTP factions.

By mid-2020, several key splinters, including those aligned with al-Qaeda, had rejoined under the leadership of TTP chief Mufti Noor Wali. In internal communications, Wali praised the Afghan Taliban's unity and urged Pakistani jihadist groups to follow suit, reportedly telling his commanders: "The jihad in Pakistan will not succeed until all mujahideen under one flag, as our Afghan brothers have done."

The Taliban's return in full power in August 2021 was a watershed moment for militant ideologies across the region. For the TTP, it was both an inspiration and a validation of their long-term strategy.

Since then, Pakistan has seen a sharp resurgence in insurgent violence. In 2024, terrorist attacks rose 70 percent from the previous year, reaching 521 incidents. These claimed 852 lives, a 23 percent increase in fatalities, according to the Pak Institute for Peace Studies. The surge marks the fourth consecutive year of escalating attacks on security forces and related casualties since 2021.

"PERMISSIVE ENVIRONMENT" IN AFGHANISTAN

The Pakistani military recently claimed it had killed 47 militants in two separate raids, as they attempted to infiltrate from Afghanistan into Balochistan's Zhob district, one of the deadliest cross-border clashes in recent months. While the military provided few details, it identified the militants as belonging to Fitrat al-Khwarij, a term coined by the military leadership for the TTP and other Islamist militant groups.

"While the US may have ended its presence, it left behind an unstable

RETHINKING THE TALIBAN DOCTRINE, PAGE 2

EOS

FROM STRATEGIC DEPTH TO SECURITY NIGHTMARE

RETHINKING THE TALIBAN DOCTRINE, PAGE 1

Afghanistan, making it a sanctuary for regional militant groups," a senior security official in Islamabad tells me. "Whether it is ideological confidence, access to abandoned US weaponry, or physical sanctuaries, these groups are receiving active support or passive facilitation from the Taliban administration in Kabul."

A recent report by the UN Security Council's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team echoed these concerns. It noted that the TTP, operating in a "permissive environment" in Afghanistan, now fields around 6,000 fighters and has acquired advanced weaponry, significantly enhancing its operational capabilities with substantial logistical and tactical support from the de facto Afghan authorities.

Muhammad Feyyaz, a Lahore-based academic specialising in terrorism studies, describes the Taliban's return as "costly" for Pakistan. "Before the takeover, Pakistan faced no existential threat from Afghanistan. Now, Taliban-ruled Afghanistan poses exactly that," he says. He said that the Taliban administration is actively backing the TTP's efforts to regain Pakistan's tribal belt as part of a larger vision for a transnational Islamic emirate.

While Pakistan's military demonstrated during Operation Zarb-i-Azb that it could inflict severe damage on militant networks, the security environment of today is fundamentally different, more fragmented, more complex, and far less conducive to decisive action. The political, security, and economic realities of post-2021 Pakistan are inextricably linked to the dramatic shifts in Afghanistan following the Taliban's return to power.

Pakistan has not been able to mount an effective counterterrorism response against TTP, the Haiz Gul Bahadur faction and other groups due to the US exit from Afghanistan, fractured relations with the Taliban, divergent postures on the TTP and the growing state-society gap in the areas along with Afghanistan-Pakistan border regions, according to Abdul Basit, an expert at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore.

POLITICAL CHAOS, FRACTURED CONSENSUS

In recent weeks, KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has been navigating turbulent political waters. Meeting with *jirga* leaders from the former tribal districts, he encouraged a unified stance against any new military operation and the mass displacement it could trigger. Tribal elders instead proposed a broad-based, empowered *jirga*, including federal and provincial representatives, elders and key stakeholders, to open dialogue directly with the Taliban administration in Kabul.

Gandapur also faces resistance from within his own party. In July, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan has warned against authorising military action in KP, particularly in the merged tribal districts. The party's stance is explicit: no renewed operations on home soil.

This is a sharp contrast to 2014, when the Karachi airport attack and the Army Public School (APS) massacre forged an unprecedented national consensus behind Operation Zarb-i-Azb. Political parties, civil society and the media stood united.

Today, however, major political parties, including PTI, Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F) and the Awami National Party (ANP), openly oppose a new offensive, warning of mass displacement and social disruption. Grassroots peace campaigns in KP are already rallying public resistance, underscoring that, without political consensus, the state's ability to act decisively will remain limited. Since 2008, residents have endured multiple operations under different names, yet neither peace has returned nor terrorism has been eradicated, local activists complain.

CROSS-BORDER SANCTUARIES

A decade ago, the TTP was weakened by internal divisions, defections to the ISKP and the loss of senior leaders to US drone strikes. Today, the picture is starkly different. Since the Taliban's takeover of Kabul in August 2021, the TTP has consolidated its splinter factions, absorbing smaller outfits linked to al-Qaeda, local activists complain.

"They've now dispersed across Pakistan, while securing hideouts in Afghanistan," a senior Peshawar-based law enforcement official says. "The Taliban regime not only shelters them but also arms them with modern weapons and night-vision gear abandoned by US forces." This level of support marks a significant shift from the previous Afghan government of Asif Ghani, which had at times cooperated with Islamabad to capture senior TTP leaders, such as Maulvi Faqir Muhammad of Bajaur.

The Taliban administration's release of hundreds of imprisoned TTP fighters from Afghan jails has revitalised the insurgency, allowing the group to regroup, rearm and conduct operations with heightened sophistication, according to officials.

Adding to the complexity is the emergence of a new jihadist alliance, Itehadul Mujahideen Pakistan (IMP), comprised of the Haiz Gul Bahadur faction, Lashkar-i-Islam, and Ingilah-i-Islami Pakistan. Since its formation, the IMP has conducted numerous attacks against Pakistani police and armed forces, primarily in southern KP. The alliance has also expressed its intention to expand operations into other provinces, including Punjab.

The overall conflict has also seen a growing use of drones by both militant groups and state security forces, tactics that have, tragically, increased civilian casualties, including children.

ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS, REDUCED US SUPPORT

Pakistan now confronts the challenge of counterterrorism in an environment devoid of the robust external support it enjoyed a decade ago. In 2014, political stability, relative economic health, and American assistance, including funding, intelligence sharing, and targeted drone strikes, played a decisive role in degrading TTP capabilities.

Today, the economic situation is far bleaker. Mounting debt and fiscal instability have left fewer resources for intelligence gathering, advanced technology procurement, and the deployment of specialised manpower, all crucial to effective counterterrorism operations.

According to Basit, "The US exit from Afghanistan, which had provided intelligence and financial assistance while also restricting TTP and other groups' movements into Afghanistan, altered regional dynamics."



Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi meets with Pakistan's army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, in Rawalpindi on May 7, 2023; the resurgence of militant groups, such as the TTP and Baloch separatists, has emerged as Pakistan's most pressing security challenge in years | AP

There are signs of renewed, albeit limited, US cooperation. Washington recently acknowledged Pakistan's role in capturing a regional ISKP leader linked to the 2021 Kabul airport attack that killed American troops. Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir's two visits within just one, and a half months to Washington underscore Islamabad's efforts to re-engage with the US security establishment.

On August 11, the US administration designated the BLA and its suicide bomber unit, the Majheed Brigade, as foreign terrorist organizations.

However, Basit warns that it will be nowhere near the coordination we witnessed during the war on terror or the pre-2021 era.

"During that time, it was a US-led, Pakistan-assisted counterterrorism template. Now it's a Pakistan-led, US-enabled counterterrorism equation where Washington will provide financial support, training and equipment," said some specialised counterterrorism equipment," he adds. "But, there will be no funding made available to Pakistan."

He says that counterterrorism is no more a top priority for the US, it is a tactical concern, and the Biden-Trump bromance will unlock limited, tactical and transactional cooperation on counterterrorism.

BETWEEN BROTHERHOOD AND BLOWBACK

"It's easy for Pakistan to demand the expulsion of *mujahideen* from Afghanistan," says Qari Jamaluddin, a mid-ranking official in the Taliban administration, using the term to refer to Pakistani militants who sought refuge in Afghanistan after Pakistan launched Operation Zarb-i-Azb in 2014. "But such demands do not align with the *jihadist* worldview, nor with the principles of Islamic or Pashtun brotherhood."

We met in Kabul on a cold evening in late 2023. I had first known Jamaluddin during his Karachi days. A staunch loyalist of the Taliban's first regime, his family fled to Pakistan following the 2001 US invasion. In exile, he attended a *madrassah* [religious school] and ran a cloth shop, but his conviction in the Taliban's eventual return never faltered. "It was only a matter of time," he would often say.

Shortly after Kabul fell in August 2021, Islamabad pressed the Taliban leadership to stop the TTP from launching attacks inside Pakistan. The effort failed. Instead, the Taliban urged Islamabad to address the TTP's so-called "grievances" and offered to mediate peace talks, a proposal that exposed the depth of their reluctance to act against former battlefield allies. Talks began but quickly collapsed, leading to renewed violence.

Officially, the Taliban administration denies harbouring foreign militants and frames Pakistani concerns as internal political matters. Yet their counterterrorism policy remains selective, while actively targeting the ISKP, they tolerate the TTP. The Taliban refrain from labelling the TTP as terrorists, viewing them instead as ideological kin and historical comrades-in-arms.

Jamaluddin characterises Islamabad's support for the Taliban as strictly transactional. "Pakistan backed us to counter Indian influence but, at the same time, it

handed over our leaders to the Americans. We endured it because every insurgency needs sanctuaries in a neighbouring country."

In Pakistan, the Taliban once found an enabling ecosystem across segments of society that allowed them to reorganise and mount a lethal insurgency from around 2003 onward. Without that support, Jamaluddin acknowledges, the Taliban's rise to power would have been far more difficult.

"It was not the Pakistani state, but the TTP, Pakistani religious activists and madressah teachers that stood unwaveringly with the Taliban," he says. "They fought and died for us while being hunted by US drones in North Waziristan."

Many Taliban leaders and experts argue that the reluctance to confront the TTP runs deeper than politics. "The relationship between the Taliban and the *mujahideen* is based on shared ideological, instructional, and cultural bonds," says Jabbar Durrani, an Afghan researcher based in Britain. "This connection extends beyond the top leadership to include their rank-and-file members, who often maintain close personal and operational ties."

Former Afghan refugee minister Khalilur Rehman Haqqani, later assassinated in an ISKP attack in December 2024, recounted in a 2023 TV interview how TTP founder Baitullah Mehdi once captured dozens of Pakistani security personnel to secure the release of Taliban prisoners, including Haqqani himself. For many Taliban leaders, such episodes are enduring reminders of shared sacrifice.

This history reinforces the perception among the Taliban's ranks in Afghanistan that cutting ties with the TTP would be both ungrateful and dangerous. "Any heavy-handed move against the TTP" warns Durrani, "could trigger internal dissent and drive their fighters into the arms of ISKP, already locked in a bitter conflict with the Afghan Taliban."

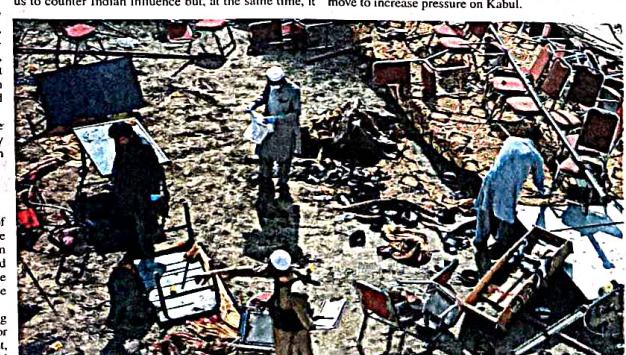
PAKISTAN'S RESPONSE

Frustrated by a surge in terrorist attacks, Pakistan has adopted a mix of hard and soft power tactics to pressure the Taliban administration in Kabul into acting against the TTP.

Since 2022, the Pakistani military has carried out at least three airstrikes in eastern Afghanistan, the most significant occurring in December 2024, when jets targeted suspected Pakistani militant hideouts in Paktika province.

In parallel, Islamabad has sought to exert economic and demographic pressure. Since September 2023, it has expelled over one million undocumented Afghans, imposed a strict visa regime at the previously open Chaman border crossing, and tightened Afghan transit trade. These measures, which drew condemnation from UN agencies and human rights organisations, have disrupted bilateral trade and restricted Afghanistan's access to essential imports.

While Pakistan's Interior Ministry defended the expulsions as a "sovereign right to regulate illegal foreign nationals", the timing suggested a calculated move to increase pressure on Kabul.



Police officials examine the site of a suicide bombing carried out by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) at a Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) rally in Bajaur district on July 31, 2023; frustrated by a surge in terrorist attacks, Pakistan has adopted a mix of hard and soft power tactics to pressure the Taliban administration in Kabul | AFP

IS PAKISTAN'S AFGHAN POLICY A FAILURE?

"Whether it was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 or the US-led intervention in 2001, Pakistan could not remain neutral," a senior military official remarks when asked if the country's Afghan policy has failed, as many critics contend. "Our geographic location has never afforded us the luxury of detachment. Proximity to conflict zones involving global powers has historically required us to take sides, always to safeguard national interests," he adds.

Pakistan's longstanding policy toward Afghanistan has been a subject of intense debate, often viewed by critics as a series of miscalculations. Yet, officials in Islamabad defend their approach as a necessary response to a complex geopolitical landscape, driven by the country's unique geographic position. The Taliban's refusal to act against anti-Pakistan militants now exposes the limits of Islamabad's long-standing *neutrality* and *detachment*.

From arming the Afghan *mujahideen* against the Soviet Union in the 1980s to supporting the Taliban's rise in 1996, and even after its ouster in 2001, Pakistan has often viewed Afghanistan less as a sovereign neighbour and more as "strategic depth." Critics contend this policy has produced severe blowback, fueling militancy, straining border relations and deepening Pakistan's diplomatic isolation.

Today, after four years of the Taliban's rule, Pakistan is attempting a delicate balancing act. While it extended soft recognition to the Taliban regime in 1996, its response to the Taliban's return in August 2021 has been far more cautious. Islamabad has not formally recognised the new government but has granted it de facto recognition, allowing ambassadorial work to continue. This measured approach reflects lessons learned from the international consensus that followed its early recognition in the 1990s.

Islamabad is now advocating for an "inclusive" political settlement in Afghanistan, a position it shares with other regional powers such as China, Russia and Iran. This stance, which emphasises incorporating diverse ethnic and political factions, marks a strategic shift away from an over-reliance on any single group, such as the Taliban, and highlights Pakistan's effort to align its policy with international consensus.

The future of Pakistan's Afghan policy hinges on whether this new approach can navigate the intricate dynamics of internal security, regional rivalries and the push for international legitimacy.

A TASTE OF RESOLVE

The resurgence of militant groups such as the TTP and Baloch separatists has emerged as Pakistan's most pressing security challenge in years. The threat is no longer confined to the country's peripheries, but is steadily encroaching inland.

In Punjab's Bhakkar district, authorities have warned government employees to avoid neighbouring areas of KP, amid credible kidnapping threats. In Balochistan, the suspension of internet services until August 31 underscores the severity of the separatist threat and the daily disruption it inflicts on residents.

Four years of the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan have not led to regional stability but have instead fuelled a complex web of security, political and economic challenges for Pakistan. A stark and uncomfortable comparison arises: while the Taliban, with limited resources, has managed to maintain internal control and weaken ISKP, Pakistan, despite its vast and sophisticated security infrastructure, continues to struggle with resurgent militancy.

This disparity compels an honest and critical reassessment of Pakistan's security doctrine. The question is whether the tools and strategies that served Pakistan for decades are still effective against a fundamentally changed, more fragmented and more complex threat.

With violence escalating in KP, Islamabad may soon be forced to abandon limited, intelligence-led campaigns. For many, ongoing peace talks between local *jirgas* and the TTP serve a dual purpose: proving that all peaceful avenues have been exhausted and building public support for stronger action.

Yet, success will not be measured by force alone. Rebuilding public trust, demonstrating decisive gains and avoiding the cycles of the past will be critical. The path Pakistan chooses in the coming months will not only determine the fate of this insurgent wave. It will shape the country's security trajectory for years to come. ■

The writer is a journalist and researcher whose work has appeared in Dawn, The New York Times and other publications, and has worked for various policy institutes. He can be reached at zee.rehman@gmail.com

HISTORY

THE STORY OF SINDH'S AFRICAN SLAVES

While the transatlantic slave trade dominates global memory, few know that Karachi was once a thriving hub for 'black ivory.' Under the Talpurs, slaves were taxed, categorised and sold — some for as little as sixty rupees.

Even after the British abolished slavery, the trade persisted in the shadows...

By Dr Muhammad Ali Shaikh

Before British rule in Sindh, especially during the 18th and 19th centuries, Karachi was a hub of the slave trade in the region.

In his 1890 book *Kurrachee: Past, Present and Future*, the British politician Alexander F. Baillie wrote, "Slavery was an institution; as also was the slave trade. Not only were many slaves kept in the town, but Kurrachee was a great depot for supplying the up-country districts."

During this period, Karachi's slave market was part of a large Arab-led Indian Ocean slave trade, with Muscat in Oman serving as its centre. When Oman took control of the Swahili coast of East Africa and the nearby Zanzibar archipelago, the slave trade became even more intense. The practice involved raiding parties, mostly composed of local Africans, capturing villages and handing them over to their Arab patrons, who sold them in the famous slave market on the island of Zanzibar.

Another source of slaves was the spoils of war between tribes, which brought not only gold, silver and other valuables taken from the enemy after the conflict, but also their men, women and children, who were sold in slave markets worldwide. Besides economic gain, this also served as a way to demonstrate power and control.

In this network, slaves destined for Sindhi from Zanzibar first arrived in Muscat and were then shipped to Karachi for sale. The local name for these African slaves was 'Sheedi'.

The slave trade in Karachi reached its peak in the 1830s. This surge was due to the fact that, by then, the British had established control over a large part of the Indian Subcontinent, where they had banned or discouraged the trade. During this period, Sindhi, still under the Talpurs, and its port of Karachi, became a hub of the slave trade.

According to Commander Thomas Greer Carless, a British naval officer known for his role in surveying and mapping the coast of Karachi in the 1830s, more than 1,500 slaves arrived in Karachi from Muscat in 1837. Although Sindhi, was annexed by the British in 1843, the trade in slaves, nicknamed 'black ivory', continued for several more decades, though secretly. Writing in his book in 1890, Baillie reported that, in that year, about 25 people were brought to Karachi by slave traders but found no market to sell them.

'BLACK IVORY' FOR SALE

There were many categories among the slaves. While in most parts of the world, including the transatlantic slave trade, there was higher demand for healthy men to work on agricultural fields under tough conditions, the demand in the Karachi market was primarily for girls and women, who made up about three-fourths of the turnover.

Among males, Sheedi boys were a favoured 'commodity' for Karachi's fishermen, who regarded them as highly intelligent and quick learners, with the potential to become intrepid sailors. Older males were in demand in the upcountry

districts for work in agriculture, as the advent of Talpur rule in Sindh in 1783 had led to the distribution of large tracts of land to Talpur nobles and other Baloch tribes.

The price for such slaves ranged from sixty to one hundred rupees, depending on "their strength and appearance," Baillie noted. The locals usually preferred younger slaves over older ones, as there was a higher chance of a mature person fleeing in a flat country such as Sindhi.

Another category of slaves brought to Sindhi was called 'Hubshees', who came from Abyssinia [Habash] or modern-day Ethiopia. They were seen as a higher class and were imported in smaller numbers, mainly mature females. Their price ranged from Rs170 to Rs250 in Karachi's market, depending on appearance.

Exceptionally attractive female Hubshees slaves could sell for up to Rs500. Understandably, this class of slaves was bought exclusively by the elites for their households. Sometimes, locals also sought Hubshees boys, but their import depended on a confirmed order and their price was about one hundred rupees.

Yet another group of slaves was brought in from the Makran coast, known as Makrani in local languages. A genetic study of the Makrani population in Karachi, conducted by Ronald Lasso-Jadari et al and published in 2017 in the *American Journal of Human Genetics*, states, "The Makranis are the result of an admixture event between local Baloch tribes and Bantu-speaking populations from eastern or southeastern Africa; we dated this event to 300 years ago during the Omani Empire domination."

The next class of slaves was not imported but produced locally. It consisted of children born from the union of local Sindhi men and slave women from any of the above categories, with the child considered an extension of their slave mother. These children were called "Gaddo", meaning mixed or combined in the Sindhi language (Baillie has misspelled it as 'Guddo', which can be attributed to his unfamiliarity with Sindhi phonetics).

The highest class consisted of the offspring of Sindhi men and Gaddo women. These children, born in the palaces and houses of the ruling Talpurs, were given the title of "Qambrani" after Qamar, the most favoured, faithful and freed slave of Hazrat Ali (AS) from earlier Islamic history.

The slave trade in Karachi was a significant source of taxation and income for the Talpur dynasty, which charged five and a half rupees for each slave sold in the town.

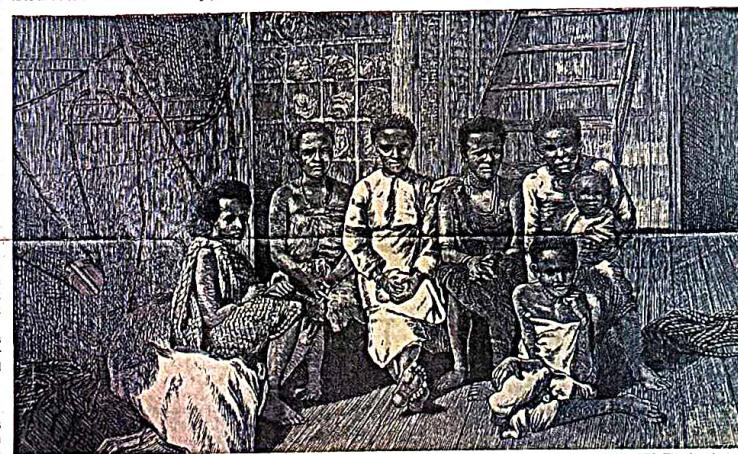
SOCIAL STATUS AND RULE IN SOCIETY

Most European travellers and authors visiting Sindhi during the 18th and 19th centuries praised the treatment of slaves. In a world where slaves faced oppression and racialism, Sindhi was a relatively peaceful place for them. Because of this, many enslaved people in Karachi disliked manumission [being freed], as it could put them into the brutal hands of those outside Sindhi.

For instance, Baillie remarked: "The great



A 19th-century engraving depicting an Arab slave-trading caravan transporting enslaved Africans slaves: although the Indian Ocean slave trade had existed for a long time, it grew considerably in India and other Indian Ocean regions from the late 17th to the mid-19th century | Wikimedia Commons



An illustration from the book *Slave-catching in the Indian Ocean* by Philip Howard Colombe, published in 1873. The book details the British naval campaign to suppress the East African slave trade in the late 19th century

cruelty of tearing them [slaves] from their parents [by Arab traders] in early childhood was undoubtedly perpetrated on these unfortunate classes but, in their new homes, they do not appear to have suffered any ill-treatment... They were treated as inmates and lived so comfortably that manumission, which was rarely practised, except for religious motives, would have been to them an evil rather than a benefit."

Another eyewitness, Edward Archer Langley, who served as a British political agent in Kharipur State, wrote in his 1860 book, *Narrative of a Residence at the Court of Meer Ali Moorad*. "These slaves were treated as inmates of the family and lived so comfortably that emancipation was to them rather an evil than a benefit. In some cases, they rose to distinction and, as confidential servants of the princes, exercised much authority over their inferiors."

Another English traveller named T. Postans, who visited Sindhi in the early 19th century, also discussed the topic in his 1843 book, *Personal Observations on Sind*. He wrote: "Slavery in a very mild form exists in Sindhi: the natives of Zanzibar are brought to the country when very young and are sold to the wealthier classes; but in Sindhi... the term slavery does not imply a state of cruel or degrading bondage. Slaves are often treated with great consideration and often become the most influential members of a family."

The primary roles of slaves included serving as soldiers in the army, palace guards, horse-keepers, grass-cutters, day labourers and helpers to various local craftsman such as carpenters and blacksmiths. Another major area where they played a significant role was as domestic servants for large landowners and wealthy merchants.

The British explorer and army officer Richard Burton, known for his travels and explorations, provided a vivid description of how slaves in Sindhi lived in his 1851 book, *Sindhi and the Races that Inhabit the Valley of Indus*. He wrote: "Their [African slaves] great delights are eating, drinking, music, and dancing... On several occasions, I have seen them dance so long and so violently that more than one performer has been carried off quite insensible."

Describing the celebrations at Karachi's Mangho Pir, he wrote: "At a well-known place of pilgrimage near Kurrachee, called Mager-Pir, their dances are more ceremonious and systematic: they are

performed under a tamarind or other tree, and an offering of incense is made."

In this environment, many slaves earned significant fame and recognition. One of the most notable examples is Hosh Muhammad, also known as Hosh Sheedi, who came from a slave background. His role as part of the Sindhi army against British forces during the 1843 war is highly praised. His famous slogan, "Mar veson par Sindhi na desron" [I may die but I will not forsake Sindhi], became a proverb.

Another notable example is writer Muhammad Siddiq Musafir, born in 1879, whose father, Gulab Khan, was brought as a slave from Zanzibar via Muscat. Musafir gained recognition as an educator and scholar, having authored over a hundred books and several articles. He died in 1961 and is still regarded as a laureate par excellence in Sindhi.

POST-EMANCIPATION SCENARIO

It might be called an irony of fate that the British, against whom Hosh Sheedi and other African-origin slave soldiers had fought so fiercely in 1843, abolished slavery in Sindhi after their victory and freed all the slaves from bondage. In these circumstances, many slaves chose to stay with their former masters, albeit in new roles such as servants and labourers.

Others, in addition to those whose masters could no longer afford them due to their financial hardships under British rule, went ahead to establish their residential communities in villages and towns. In this venture, mutual help, unity and solidarity were their main tools for survival. They found employment as field labourers, domestic servants and craftsmen, albeit in new roles such as servants and labourers.

The sheedis maintained many of their African customs and traditions, the chief among which was the beating of the call drum (shaped like a kettle-drum) called *mugarm* or *maseendo*, and singing songs and hymns in a language peculiar to them, possibly an admixture of Arabic and Swahili," observed Dr Feroz Ahmed of Howard University in his 1989 research article 'Africa on the coast of Pakistan.'

In the case of Karachi, Lyari became the most preferred destination for many newly freed slaves because the settlement already had a significant number of former slaves of Sindhi merchants. This transformed Lyari into a large area of irregularly constructed houses, lacking civic amenities. Over time, due to upheavals in the coastal regions of Balochistan, more slaves and non-slaves moved eastward, with some settling in the eastern part of the Makran coast and others in Karachi's Lyari. As a result, "the Baghdadi sector [neighbourhood] of Lyari, in particular, received a heavy concentration of Black people," wrote Dr Ahmed.

"Those who had come from Makran were called *Makranis*, those who came from the state of Lasbela were called *Lasis*, and those who immigrated from Kutch were called *Kutchis*. However, for many outsiders, the word *makaani* became synonymous with the people of African origin," Dr Ahmed explained.

They adapted to the new conditions of their lives and took up work as dock workers, porters, donkey cart drivers, as well as fishermen and boat crew in Karachi. Some of them, familiar with agricultural jobs, moved to Malir, where they began working on farms.

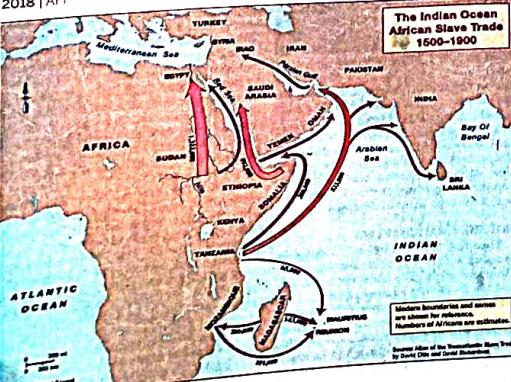
Today, centuries after their ancestors' enslavement and forced removal from Africa, most of their descendants are poor and live in poverty-stricken conditions in Lyari. Despite this, they have kept vital aspects of African culture alive in Karachi and throughout Sindhi. One of their proud cultural legacies kept alive is the *Sheedi* dance, with or without the *Mugarm* drum, which is performed not only at numerous shrines in Karachi and Makran, but also at wedding ceremonies.

While these are undoubtedly important cultural and social legacies of people of African descent in Karachi, I believe the most significant legacy is the socially and culturally liberated Black women of Lyari. As Dr Ahmed rightly noted, it was the women of Lyari alone who could sing and dance in the streets about the victory of their favoured political party in elections, when no one else could even imagine this kind of celebration. ■

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Members of Karachi's Sheedi community, descendants of Africans brought to India as slaves, during the festival at the Mangho Pir shrine in Karachi in April 2018 | AFP



► FOOTBALL

Earlier this month, an U-15 football team of boys known as the Better Future Pakistan team won laurels for their country in the prestigious Norway Cup. Who are they?

SCORING A BETTER FUTURE

By Taha Goheer

On August 2, a youth football team comprising boys primarily from the Lyari and Malir communities in Karachi defeated a Norwegian club, to claim the U-15 title in the 2025 edition of the Norway Cup. This marked the first time a youth team from Pakistan had won an international tournament.

The Norway Cup is the largest youth football tournament in the world, where more than 2,000 teams of boys and girls participate across multiple age categories, ranging from U-6 to U-19. Categories encompass 3v3 and 5v5 matchups up till the U-10 level, and 7-a-side and 11-a-side matchups for all higher categories. Participating teams hail from 60 countries across the globe, totalling more than 25,000 individual players.

The Pakistani team that did wonders is named Better Future Pakistan (BFP). The U-15 category they competed in was one of the most popular. 144 teams entered the tournament. In the first round, BFP topped their group, winning all three of their matches without conceding and scoring 16 goals in the process.

This allowed them to skip the Round of 128 and proceed directly to the Round of 64, where they defeated Levanger FK 4-0. Levanger FK competes in the third division of Norwegian football. In the Round of 32, BFP faced Skield, a professional team in the second division of Norwegian football, for their toughest test yet, eking out a 4-2 win. Dispatching Stjordals-Blink 4-0 in the Round of 16 earned BFP a berth in the quarterfinals, where they beat Grekær IF 4-2. In the semi-finals, Gjelleråsen was swept aside in a comprehensive 4-1 victory.

Reaching the finals matched BFP's own achievement from last year, when they lost on penalties. Roared on by a small contingent of the Pakistani diaspora based in Oslo, they took the field determined to go one step further. They controlled the final against Gjøvik-Lyn FK, winning 2-0, courtesy goals from Ahmed Ali and Owais.

Cue the celebrations; cue the *Dil Dil Pakistan* playbacks.

But who are these Better Future Pakistan kids?

Better Future Pakistan was founded by six Norwegian-Pakistanis in 2017 in a bid to give back to the underprivileged communities in Pakistan. They started off by distributing sewing machines and training the women who received them to promote financial independence. But this didn't align with the passion that united the six friends: sports in general and football in particular.

So the six, namely Farooq Ansari, Soliman Sarwar, Imran Ullah, Omar Rafiq, Atif Mir and Imran Tariq, decided to assist football institutions within Pakistan. For the first few years, they were more like consultants;



The triumphant team celebrates | Social Media

helping teams register in international tournaments, helping high-potential players find clubs abroad, enlightening Pakistani coaches on tactics and training regimes, and providing training to children and clubs on the nutritional requirements for football players.

And they had the credentials to undertake this: Omar Rafiq and Imran Tariq are professional referees in Norway, and almost all of them have coaching experience with youth teams.

However, this didn't create the impact they had aimed for. So in 2022, Better Future Pakistan opened a football club as a non-profit organisation in Malir, where they would train young, talented players from impoverished backgrounds who might not have the resources required to play the game at a high level.

They built the club around their head coach, Abdul Rasheed, a man with more than 15 years of coaching experience at the highest level of Pakistani football. "We had known Rasheed sahib for quite a while, and we knew he was the right person to coach these young kids," comments Imran Ullah, one of the founders of BFP. "Surprisingly, none of us six is from Karachi, but we chose Karachi for our football club because of the passion people have for the game here."

Soon, the football club moved to Lyari, keeping the Malir branch operational for children under 11. A scouting network was established to identify the most talented children across Karachi and another team was tasked to run background checks on the kids identified. "We must ensure that everyone who comes into the academy is deserving of their place," explains Imran. "We can't have someone who isn't talented or who doesn't have the will to improve, because that would deprive someone more deserving of a spot. Likewise, we can't have someone from an affluent background, as that would mean someone talented who couldn't afford private academies would miss out." Shortlisted children are then passed through trials, to ensure the best make it in.

Within a couple of years, BFP was sending a team to participate in the Norway Cup, finishing runners-up in the U-15 boys' category. "We were unfortunate, because we were beaten through the entire tournament and only lost the final on penalties," says Imran. "But reaching the final was a massive achievement too, and showcased how quickly these boys improve when they have the right resources available. This is because of their talent, but also because they're willing to learn."

—Anirudh contribution to the rapid improvement of

Kristian Carlsen, a UEFA certified coach with over 20 years of experience across the world, with whom BFP has partnered.

"2025 has been the best year for us so far," beams Imran. "Two of our kids, Kashif and Subhan Karim, made it to the U-17 national team, which was a very proud moment for us. Then we won the Norway Cup, going one better than last year, with an entirely new team. We made sure to give opportunities to new players, even though some players from last year were still eligible and willing to participate. But the biggest achievement for us was setting up a girls' team under a female coach and their participation in the Norway Cup, where they topped their group and won two matches."

Role models are necessary to promote girls taking up sport, and Imran acknowledges that the Pakistan Women's Football team and, especially, Karachi-based players like Suhra Hirani doing well recently helped with girls enrolling in the academy. "We hope our success in the Norway Cup inspires more girls to take up the sport. That will be our legacy."

Looking forward, Imran says they're working on two streams. First, finding their players career opportunities as back-up to their football careers. "While we want all our players to succeed as professional footballers, we also acknowledge it is very difficult. With Mohsen Gilani coming in as PFF President and Noberto Solano as the coach for the national team, we hope our league structure will return, helping our kids land full-time professional contracts."

"However, in Karachi's landscape, where more than a million children don't go to school, anyone who doesn't make it as a professional will be severely financially compromised. So, we've partnered with the Alkhidmat Foundation to provide the kids with skills education to ensure everyone has a back-up option ready."

The second stream is an expansion of the academy and sustained excellence. "Running this operation is very costly," points out Imran. "Providing children with the right equipment and gear, meals with the right nutritional value and accommodation to outstation kids — we have some kids from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan on our roster too. And then, participation in tournaments — flights, accommodation, visa and documentation fees. "We have some sponsors, and we were recognised by the mayor of Karachi and the governor of Sindh last year, but we lack funding from within Pakistan," adds Imran. "To ensure we can induct more children and participate in more tournaments in Europe and the Middle East, we'd like to make a humble appeal to the governments of Sindh and Pakistan. A little sponsorship from your end in the form of finances, or a new ground, could do wonders to our project and bring further laurels to our country."

The writer is a sports enthusiast with a background in supply chain management. Anirudh is a

► HERITAGE

GUESTS OUT OF A HOUSE

Once a thriving literary landmark, Pioneer Book House is another casualty in Karachi's relentless drive for development. Can the city preserve its history before it's too late?

By Umer Sheikh

In a city with new coffee shops popping up every week, it is almost ironic that Karachi's bookstores are being lost to development.

At some point in time, it was a norm for one to walk into a tea house or a cafe, with a book pressed under one's arm. After Partition, there were around 30 bookstores in the Saddar area alone. Elphinstone Street (now Zainabia Street) is recalled to have been lined with bookstores. This included Thomas & Thomas Booksellers near Regal Chowk and Pioneer Book House on Bunder Road (now MA Jinnah Road).

I recently got the news that Pioneer Book House had to vacate its longtime premises, forcing it to relocate to a smaller premises in the vicinity of the city court in the city's downtown area. This news was deeply saddening and leaves a big question mark over where we are headed as a city, if we cannot sustain bookstores.

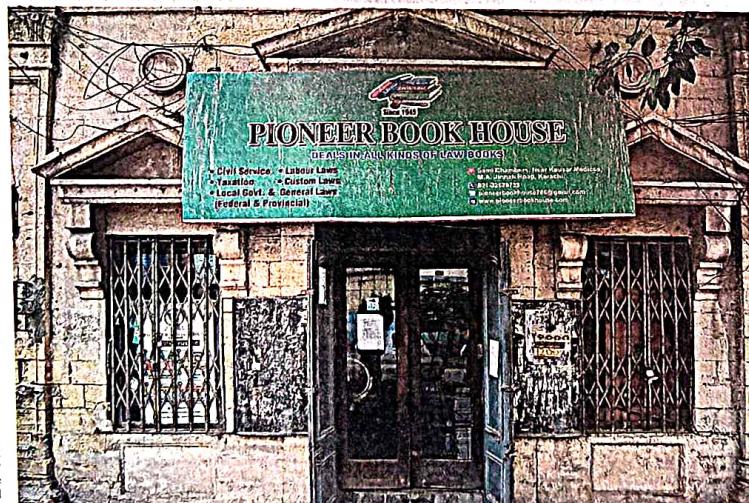
A REFUGE FOR BOOK LOVERS

Pioneer Book House was established in 1945 by Inayat Hussain, who migrated to Karachi from Bombay. Already having been involved in the business of pens and stationery, he established Pioneer Book House in the then Avon Lodge (now Sami Chambers). The bookstore was the first official distributor of Faber-Castell stationery. Later, it became primarily a bookstore dealing with law books.

Over the years, the building and the bookstore were witness to a lot of things. The upper floor — which later became a gallery and reading room — once housed a tailor's workshop. There used to be another bookstore in the building that closed down.

Pioneer, too, was at the brink of closure nine years ago, until it was given a new life when, on discovering its historical significance and current state of affairs, writer Maniza Naqvi worked tirelessly to keep the bookstore afloat but also create a magical little nook on the upper storey of the bookstore. It became known as the *Refuge for Book Lovers*. This became a space for readings and gatherings of book lovers.

"It's not bricks and mortar that are a thing of beauty if they are dead spaces or turned into meaningless monuments," Naqvi tells *Eos*. "Beauty happens when people interact



The Pioneer Book House a week before the shut down of its premises on MA Jinnah Road on July 1, 2025 | Photo by the writer

and exchange experiences and ideas and build positive relationships in these spaces. That is what I fostered," Naqvi adds.

LOCKING STEP WITH MEMORIES

On the countless occasions I visited the bookstore, I would without fail walk up the stairs past the tea house floor to the Opeartor's Gallery. It always gave me a feeling of climbing up into an enchanted old attic, such as the ones I had read about in Enid Blyton books as a child.

In this magical little place, one could hear the distant echoes of all the readings that had taken place, including by the late Akhtar Baloch and his readings from his wonderful book on Karachi, *Karaanchi Wala*.

Another feature of the space was Akhtar Soomro's photographs of Karachi,

especially Lyari, the neighbourhood where he was born and lived most of his life. One very striking photograph from the exhibit features a young boy staring into the camera, with his hands covered in boxing mitts, raised and tense in front of him. This photograph was also featured on the poster commemorating the exhibition.

In a city that never slows down, once you entered the bookstore, the din and glamour of Bunder Road would become a distant memory.

Now, after almost a decade, the building has been purchased by new developers. The long-established *pagrī* system, due to which the bookstore was anchored at Sami Chambers, is over. The *pagrī* system is a goodwill-based rent-control system that gives perpetual rights to the renter and their progeny. Just like in most old buildings, the

system is over in this building too. The developers who now own the building don't intend to keep the bookstore.

It feels like this is the fate of spaces that due to slow down time in a city that never sleeps. It feels as though the very act of a slow, deliberate life has become a crime and the places that offer such solace are punished in the name of development.

NOT THE FINAL CHAPTER

This has led to Pioneer vacating its premises at Sami Chambers and relocating. Given the plight of bookellers in the city and the dwindling number of readers, the place might be turned into a coffee shop, a mobile repair shop, a storage godown or, worse still, bulldozed, with a new building of modern design constructed in its place. The possibility of the latter happening is

less likely, considering it is a heritage-listed building, but one can never be sure.

For almost a decade, seeing the bookstore thrive did give hope week after week, month after month, but with a lingering fear: one could never be sure how long until, like many others, this piece of Karachi's history would be lost to the claws of development. This has been a recurring instance, as our Irani restaurants, single-screen cinemas and bookstores keep disappearing.

I first discovered the bookstore after stumbling across Naqvi's book *A Guest in the House*, which I picked up from a used bookseller out of sheer curiosity, after seeing a faded map of the city on its cover. That was back in the winter of 2022.

After reading the first few chapters, I went searching for the bookstore, full of curiosity and excitement. On reaching its front door, I was exhilarated. I got to see and experience many of the things that the author mentioned in the book, including a larger canvas map souvenir that I had seen on the cover of the book.

After that, it became a frequent destination and, on meeting the author — first at the Karachi Literature Festival and, later, at the bookstore where we shared a cup of tea — I mentioned how I felt like a part of the story. The book was written and published under the banner of its business. It was also only sold at Pioneer Book House. Now, as the bookstore struggles to stay afloat, it feels like the story has also come to an end.

Bunder road and its surroundings have witnessed countless histories and microhistories that have unfolded in its many colonial buildings. Many buildings before Pioneer have been lost to development and the leftover ones are at risk of erasure.

"Very little can be done unless the government itself actually 'buys in' to these heritage businesses and the spaces they have been located in by financially protecting them," Naqvi further adds. Although disheartened, she is not entirely hopeless and believes this will be a new chapter in the story of Pioneer Book House. ■

The writer is a university student with interest in urban history, culture, and public spaces. He can be contacted at pakistaniumer04@gmail.com

► EXHIBITION

An exhibition in Paris turns the lens on South Asian weddings and posits them as carefully choreographed performances that reveal social standing, economic status and tradition

DISSECTING THE DESI WEDDING

By Pooja Lucie Willmann

Recently brought to life at Ishaque Gallery in Paris and curated by Ahi Tariq, 'The Wedding Album' is the latest chapter of Shy Bride Video Services, a performative wedding photo and videography project conceived by artists Zahra Mansoor and Juliet Lazek.

From the conception of the idea, to its execution and final delivery of the project, 'The Wedding Album' is one of those rare art forms whose layers continue to reveal themselves with time and observation. On a purely aesthetic level, one sees saturated, kitsch, the kinds often represented in Bollywood movies, a digestible and highly recognisable visual language, almost as it is taken from a collective memory.

But the heart of the project lies in its process. Over the course of five separate weddings in Karachi, Mansoor and Lazek toy with the line between research and art by enacting a method performance through the perspective of Shy Bride's "videography services." Semi-anthropological, their work ultimately reveals the performative nature of weddings, where individuals enact, reheat and reinforce their societal roles.

From intricate guest lists and lavish displays of flowers and decoration to copious amounts of food and alcohol and heavily embroidered dresses, the wedding is a crucible for socio-economic status signalling, and the marriage an institution in which it is enshrined and preserved. "Marriage is a part of the performance of life," notes Mansoor. "The wedding brings together the public and private performance, and this social game evolves into a third space. When the wedding is over, this performance becomes private."

Using the institution of marriage as a vehicle to question class and gender structures, each image becomes a multifaceted representation of a deeper phenomenon. One of them is the location of the wedding which, for the elite, often takes place at private clubs or government buildings. These places reinforce dated notions of patriarchy and economic barriers to entry, embodying the exclusive and unattainable.

The gallery also perfectly lends itself to the exhibition. Alexandre Arminjon, the founder of Ishaque Gallery, has a palpable interest in the Middle East and a passion for the craft of photography. The darkroom at the back of the space is where he personally hand-printed the analogue black-and-white images, which were displayed in the middle room.

This room is smaller and marked by a large printing machine at its centre, separated by a thick black curtain that evokes the sense of a theatre stage opening and closing. Here, the images on display are elegant and thought-provoking. The printing on velvet paper renders the subject matter and technique more refined and restrained.

With a hands-on approach, one of the focal points of the exhibition is the beautifully coloured velvet frames that adorn the walls and surround a selection of images. These are an ode to traditional velvet-bound wedding



albums which, while immortalising memories, often gather dust and become symbols of the heavy passage of time. The Shy Bride project reclaims this object, using it as a frame to re-contextualise and question the very memories it preserves.

'The Wedding Album' is a subtle act of resistance. It is a tender, satirical observation of an institution that touches every part of public and private life in South Asia. ■

'The Wedding Album' was on display at Ishaque Gallery in Paris from July 3-22, 2025

The reviewer is a writer and cultural strategist based between Paris and London. She is the founder of TAARA Mag, an independent platform exploring art, identity and storytelling across South Asia and its diaspora



Silent Stories of a City

From Venetian Gothic to Art Deco, Karachi once wore its architecture like a crown. Today, that crown is being traded for boxy towers and soulless facades

By Durriya Kazi

Houses hold stories in their walls — of family meals, getting homework done, friends visiting, scribbles on the walls, and the inevitable quarrels. There is a great sense of loss as buildings are pulled down. It is as if lives are sent to some no man's land, to exist as shadows, soon to be dismissed as fanciful imagination.

Watching homes tumble like flimsy cardboard structures in the recent flash floods across the world was a shocking reminder of the vulnerability of man's claim on the earth. Family albums, carefully collected furniture and favourite clothes are turned into muddy rubble. Wars and natural disasters are seen as forces beyond the control of people. Some homes are abandoned as families disperse; some are erased by developers who only see property value instead of cherished histories.

Karachi's streets are being stripped of their history. Karachi was 'the Dubai of the late 19th century, for the most part — bare sandy tracts upon which architects, supported by local Silatwal builders, could experiment with architectural styles such as Venetian Gothic, Indo Saracenic, Art Deco and later, on 1960s' modernism.

Walking or driving through the inner city of Karachi, exquisite buildings of a past are sandwiched between thoughtlessly constructed concrete buildings. Yet, one's eyes are transfixed on these quiet sentinels of a graceful past. Who stood in their balconies, their spacious verandas, climbed their teak staircases? What did they view on the streets below?

What was Jayashankar Madhwaj's life like in the house designed by M. Nazareth on plot No 34 and 34A in Market Quarter? Or that of Noorbooy Jafferji, who lived up the road at No 81, in a house designed by Jamshedji P. Mistry? What parties were held in the beautiful residence on 82 Bunder Road, with its romantic grapevine carvings?

While the buildings fall like ninepins under the demolition squad, the streets still bear witness to Karachi's eclectic population: In just one area of Ranchore Lines, Solomon David Road, Ali Budha Street, Shivas Street, Vishan Das Street, Mir Ayub Khan Road and Kalyan Jee Street are bounded by Nabi Bux Road and Barnes Street.

Cities are always changing and growing, facing increasing pressure to provide new housing and business centres. While Karachi's town planners develop layouts of streets and zoning, and the Building Control Authority is tasked to ensure the engineering soundness and space usage of new constructions, there seems to be no attention paid to the aesthetic integration of the old and the new.

Developers, calculator in hand, are determined to ensure the maximum sellable covered area, arriving at box-like structures built with the cheapest materials in the shortest possible time. There is no room for the graceful arched verandas of Mohatta Goeds Godown on Mission Road, or the exquisite detailing of the Mohammad Ali Building in Moosa Lane.

It is not simply nostalgia for the past. A study by environmental psychologist Colin Ellard revealed that monolithic, dull facades found on modern skyscrapers and apartment blocks were found to cause stress to passers-by and inhabitants. These are not buildings that encourage intimacy, a sense of belonging and pride. The anonymous sameness devalues inhabitants, who scurry up and down dark uneven stairs to get to their box-like offices or homes.

Preservation and revitalisation of heritage localities plays a large part in cultural resilience. It is a way of being cradled by previous generations and an inspiration to carry the story forward.

Trader Seth Bhojmal saw Karachi's potential in 1729 and the East India Company administrator, Charles Napier, believed it could be the star of the East. Mayor Jamshed Nusserwanji Mehta ensured it became the cleanest city of Asia.

The old city, approximately 50 square km, a fraction of the larger 3,780 square km area of Karachi, is waiting for loving attention. Many organisations and individuals have done their best to highlight and protect Karachi's heritage.

NED University's Heritage Cell, the architect Arif Hasan, Yasmin Lari's Heritage Foundation, the architect Marvi Mazhar, heritage walkers Shaheen Nauman, Jehanzeb Salim of Super Savari Express, Farooq Soomro, The Karachi Walla, and countless researchers and photographers have worked tirelessly to protect the 1,700 declared heritage buildings. The Sindh Cultural Heritage Preservation Act was passed in 1994. Yet, they all seem helpless before the juggernaut of developers and the land mafia.

A new directive has been issued by the Chief Minister of Sindh, Murad Ali Shah, to assess the condition of listed buildings in the city. The new conversation about setting up engineering teams to specialise in their restoration, instead of demolishing and demolishing, European heritage buildings destroyed during World War II were reconstructed from existing plans. Today, new technologies, such as LiDAR scanning, can document heritage buildings in great detail and pave the way for the true preservation of Karachi's heritage. ■

Durriya Kazi is a Karachi-based artist. She may be reached at durriyakazi1918@gmail.com

SMOKERS' CORNER

The Spectre of 'Westernisation'

For decades, Pakistan's political and cultural discourse has been framed as a struggle against 'Westernisation'. But the real story is more complex — and China's pragmatic approach to Westernisation shows that modernisation need not be hostage to ideology or faith

By Nadeem F. Paracha

Eor decades, conservatives, Islamists and populists in Pakistan have been launching tirades against 'Westernisation'. Westernisation is the import and adoption of European culture, social and political ideas, and technology by non-Western societies. Interestingly, even though the US became perhaps the most active exporter of Westernisation after World War II, its own creation in the late 18th century was an outcome of Westernisation.

The US' national and cultural identity were strongly influenced by European philosophy and history. Industrialisation in the US was significantly influenced by Britain, with early American industrial development largely based on British models and technologies.

Non-Western countries embraced Westernisation because it was linked to social, political and economic modernity and 'progress'. It was closely linked to capitalism and democracy, even though many non-democratic regimes adopted it as well. But, by the late 1970s, critiques against Westernisation in non-Western regions began to find more space than before in the politics and intelligentsia of these regions.

Westernisation started to be seen as a tool of 'cultural imperialism' and a cause of identity loss and the erosion of 'traditional ways of life'. For example, many Muslim-majority countries initiated projects to replace Westernisation's economic, political and cultural products with 'Islamic' products. Ideas such as 'Islamic'

constitutions', 'Islamic banking', 'Islamic science' etc began being applied in the economic, political and cultural spheres. Such 'Islamisation' projects were an overarching response/reaction to Westernisation.

But this did not mean the outright rejection of 'Western' technology — as long as it was applied in an 'Islamic' manner. Western cultural products too were not rejected, as long as they did not offend 'Islamic sensibilities'. The outcome of all this was a complex fusion that produced societies of co-existing contrasts. But in such societies, it actually became almost impossible to reach a convincing consensus on exactly what was 'Islamic' and what wasn't.

Westernisation in various Muslim countries was systematically demonised, but its 'modernisation' aspects prevailed. On the one hand, modernisation was compartmentalised (or only made available to certain sections of the society), and, on the other hand, it was 'Islamised' (for the 'masses').

Additionally, 'postmodernism' as a collection of political, economic and cultural critiques comprehensively vilified Westernisation — even though postmodernism too was a product of the West. Postmodernism romanticised 'localism' and saw the world as an assemblage of islands with their own 'ways of life'.

Yet, postmodernism also celebrated hybridity and the mixing of cultures, which gave credence to what became to be known as 'globalisation'. This dual and often contradictory nature of postmodernism is present in many Muslim-majority regions. Contradictions can produce a

constructive synthesis but, in this case, it mostly produced confusion and identity crises.

Westernisation is no more a troubling spectre, though. One adopts it as a necessity — even selectively. Many non-Western countries have begun to use Western technologies and economic ideas to further evolve them and call them their own. China is an excellent case in point.

From 1979 onwards, the Chinese adopted Western economic and cultural ideas and technologies by first fully understanding them and then tweaking them in an entirely pragmatic manner (instead of on the basis of an ideology or faith). There might be a Chinese system of banking, for example, but it's not called Confucius or Maoist banking.

Anyone talking disparagingly about Westernisation in Pakistan vis-a-vis Islam is only deepening the confusion. If they are willing to look beyond this, they will notice that, from the 1980s onwards, the more alarming

'Islamic'/Western behaviour indoors (such as watching films, holding 'dance parties', drinking alcohol etc), as the dictatorship got busy 'Islamising' the outdoors.

Years later, those bothered by the resultant contradictory duality began to see India as some magical place of democracy, secularism, freedom and, of course, great films. As the 'Islamised' outdoors became a mere aesthetic exercise to appease anti-Westernisation crusaders, Indianisation began working as a middle path between Westernisation and 'Islamisation' for an increasing number of Pakistanis.

Intellectuals, advertising executives, commercial brands, artists and everyday folk began revering Indian cultural, academic and political content because Pakistan's own content in this regard continued to be weighed down by 'Islamisation'. However, eventually, India itself began to roll back its revered democracy and secularism, bringing exclusivist ideologies such as Hindutva to the surface. Also, India's cultural products began taking a more crass anti-Pakistan turn.

The consequential retreat of Indianisation in Pakistan has been painfully slow. But it is receding. However, its influence on anti-state ethnic and Islamist groups (both militant and political) has grown. They see India as their vessel through which they will achieve their goals.

To neutralise Indianisation, which has now taken a more sinister turn, Pakistan needs to engage with Westernisation as China has. It has to be a pragmatic engagement, based on economic and political requirements. The engagement needs to be free of any ideology or faith, though. ■



Illustration by Apra

issue has been that of 'Indianisation'. And this is due to how 'Islamisation' was concocted to supposedly stall Westernisation. Let me explain. 'Islamisation' projects not only produced a complex (and confusing) duality, they also triggered sectarian and ethnic polarisation, especially in multi-ethnic/multi-sectarian regions such as Pakistan. The country's policy contains multiple ideas of 'true Islam'. State-backed 'Islamisation' projects created tensions because these may not be acceptable to certain sects and sub-sects and even to certain ethnic groups. This triggers tensions that weaken Pakistani nationalism and identity.

Indian cultural products such as Bollywood films, though first banned in Pakistan in 1965, were unofficially allowed to be watched at home on VCRs in the 1980s — ironically during a dictatorship that was busy constructing an 'Islamisation' project. It did this to push so-called 'un-

conventional' advertising executives, commercial brands, artists and everyday folk began revering Indian cultural, academic and political content because Pakistan's own content in this regard continued to be weighed down by 'Islamisation'. However, its influence on anti-state ethnic and Islamist groups (both militant and political) has grown. They see India as their vessel through which they will achieve their goals.

To neutralise Indianisation, which has now taken a more sinister turn, Pakistan needs to engage with Westernisation as China has. It has to be a pragmatic engagement, based on economic and political requirements. The engagement needs to be free of any ideology or faith, though. ■



► FICTION

Leila Aboulela's portrayal of a woman coming to terms with the loss of her spouse in an unfamiliar culture in her latest novel is subtle, honest and unflinching and refuses the comfort of false promises

The process of grief



A New Year
By Leila Aboulela
Saqi Books
ISBN: 978-1849250733
128pp.

Reviewed by Sadia Zulfiqar

Sudanese origin, Scotland based Leila Aboulela's latest novella *A New Year* (2025) is a compelling addition to the remarkable body of work she has produced over the years — work that has garnered her numerous accolades, including this year's PEN Pinter Prize. Her novels include *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret* (2005), *Lyrics* (2010), *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015), *Bird Summers* (2018), and *River Spirit* (2023), along with two short story collections, *Coloured Lights* (2001) and *Elsewhere, Home* (2018).

A recurring thread in Aboulela's works is the focus on displacement, faith, and the lives of Muslim women. Another prominent motif that emerges across her fiction is the exploration of the experience of loss. In *The Translator*, we encounter that grief through the protagonist Sammar, in mourning for the death of her husband. In *Minaret*, similarly, Nawa grapples with the passing of her parents. Both women are relatively young, and the way they cope with their sadness suggests that the hope of finding alternative families or new partners is what allows them to resist the all-consuming darkness of loss.

Sammar eventually finds peace in new love, while Nawa continues to struggle. In Aboulela's fiction, grief is often intimately tied to displacement. For instance, in *Bird Summers*, the characters experience the sorrow of migration and the loss of familiar spaces. We watch as the novel's female characters — Salma, Iman and Moni — struggle to navigate their respective terrains of grief and ultimately arrive at some semblance of peace.

Even more so in her most recent work, *A New Year*, grief takes centre stage, to the extent that all other narratives revolve around it. Here, the grieving figure is an older woman, Suad, a retired nurse whose husband, Sheriff, suffers a heart attack at his workplace. Suad and Sheriff had been married for 46 years and have three adult children: Hamza,

Nesrine, and Mazen — the youngest of whom is unmarried and studying medicine at university.

As an emotion, of course, grief is not only complex but also confusing and full of surprises. Writers explore it in myriad ways, trying to trace the lineaments of its profound impact on human life. Yiyun Li, for example, a Chinese-born writer and professor based in the United States, offers reflections on grief that resemble — as she explains in her recent interview with *The Guardian*'s Sophie McBain — Joan Didion's accounts of losing her husband and daughter.

Both writers focus more on thoughts than feelings. One could argue, though, that neither thoughts nor feelings can exist independently of each other. Thinking of them as separate might be conceptually possible, but perhaps not practically achievable — at least not for everyone. Indeed, the attempt to deal with thoughts and feelings as distinct may end up hampering the meaning-making process that grieving individuals often undergo. However, it may be the case that grief permits no standard conversation, not even whispers; it defies all external templates and fixed methods for making sense of what life has taken away.

At any rate, Aboulela in *A New Year* delicately explores the feelings and thoughts of both Suad and

her children during the grieving process, shedding light on harsh realities often left unspoken. One such reality is that, while the lives of adult, married children move on after the loss of a parent, the parent left behind endures a different kind of grief. Supporting the bereaved parent can sometimes become burdensome, even for loving children.

In *A New Year*, Suad battles between staying with each of her children: with Nesrine and her husband Mo in Indonesia to help with the birth of their first child; with Hamza, his wife Zahra, and their children Yousef and Maha in Scotland; and with Mazen in the cramped student flat he shares with two housemates. There, Suad takes on the role of caregiver — cooking, cleaning, and supporting his students. Yet, in each home, she feels like an intruder.

Her overwhelming sense of motherhood clashes with the lives of her children and their spouses, causing tension and emotional disconnect. She begins to feel like "a poor relation, a charity case", even "a difficult teenager" in her children's eyes. Eventually, she returns to her own home in London.

Aboulela uses Suad's visits to her children's homes to demonstrate that the trauma of losing a spouse cannot be healed simply by leaning into motherhood — especially when the children are adults with lives of their own. Suad, an immigrant

who fled Sudan during wartime, lacks an extended family network. Though geographically displaced, she remains culturally tethered to Sudanese expectations of motherhood and familial duty. Yet, as she says, her children "had been brought up in another culture. They were not patient enough to put up with her. And she was not flexible enough, not grateful enough."

So what is a grieving spouse to do? Grief demands conversation. It seeks sympathetic listeners. But exile is a cruel companion. Suad "found herself repeating stories. She spoke too long until she noticed that the person she was speaking to was eager for her to stop."

In Aboulela's fiction, the central figure is often like her — a displaced Sudanese woman navigating life in a predominantly secular and unfamiliar environment — typically London or Scotland. These women rely on inner strength to confront physical, emotional and psychological challenges, and that strength is often rooted in faith. In the absence of a community grounded in shared history, language and culture, Islam helps Suad make sense of her grief.

However, *A New Year* also acknowledges that

THE PROCESS OF GRIEF, PAGE 07



► NON-FICTION

The result of years of exhaustive research, a self-published book provides readers with a closer look at the 2002 Indian Gujarat anti-Muslim pogrom

The decline of India's values



Incredible and Shining India — Transition from Secularism to Hindutva Extremism
Self-published
By Danish Javeed
ISBN: 978-627-946581-8
255pp.

Reviewed by Imtiaz Piracha

The author, Danish Javeed, devoted seven years to completing this exhaustive study of the alleged state-sponsored 2002 Gujarat pogrom in India. Nonetheless, it is a distressing read due to its gory details.

A three-day period of inter-communal violence occurred in the western Indian state of Gujarat from February 28 to March 1, 2002. The burning of a train in Godhra the day before, which caused the deaths of 58 Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya, is cited as having instigated the violence. It is alleged that it was a state-sponsored false flag operation. Further outbreaks occurred in Ahmedabad for three months. More outbreaks of violence against the minority Muslim population of Gujarat continued for the next year.

According to official figures, the riots ended with 1,044 dead, 223 missing and 2,500 injured. Among the dead, 790 were Muslim and 254 Hindu. The Concerned Citizens Tribunal Report estimated that 1,926 may have been killed.

In addition to many brutal killings, many rapes were reported, as well as widespread looting and destruction of property. Narendra Modi, then chief minister of Gujarat and later prime minister of India, was accused of condoning the violence, as were police and government officials who allegedly directed the mob and provided lists of Muslim-owned properties to the attackers.

Javeed describes how and why he undertook this gruelling project: "In June 2013, I happened to read the transcripts of inhumane

confessions by religious extremists [included in the book] about the Gujarat genocide in 2002 in India."

"Following the confessional transcripts, I studied Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International's Reports on the Gujarat genocide. In this process, I came across the 'Concerned Citizens Tribunal, Gujarat' 2002 report, titled 'Crime against Humanity', which I consider to be the most comprehensive and impartially compiled account, containing findings on the Gujarat genocide."

"The account of the cruelty unleashed during the genocide was too painful to absorb. The religious extremists slit apart pregnant women's wombs, pulled out [and] swung their footaces over swords and threw them into the fire."

He further writes, "I could not sleep that night and cursed myself for being incapable of saving innocents who were raped, mercilessly slaughtered, and burned alive. Then, I did not know that one day I would be writing a book on extremist trends and human rights abuse prevailing in today's India to bring about a realisation that may serve both peace and humanity."

There are 13 tables and 76 gruesome photographs, mostly coloured, about the events that took place and their victims during the carnage.

Some of the topics covered in detail include "How India Appears to the World Today on Human Rights Abuse and Declining Indicators"; "Gujarat Massacre-2002: Inconceivable Degree of Extremism, Immorality, and Dark Obsession"; "Attacks on Christians Post-Godhra Incident"; "All Was Pre-Planned? India Before and After Gujarat Genocide-2002: Transition from Secularism to Extremism"; "Hinduism, Hinduism and the Caste System"; "Life of Christians Under Violence"; "Sikh Community and Atrocities Faced by Them"; "State-Sponsored Assassination and Terrorism on Foreign Soil"; "Indian Held Kashmir (JHK); An Unprecedented Tale of Human Rights Violations"; "Afzal Guru's Execution"; "Immoral and Unethical Activities to Bolster Modi's Image and Target Hindutva Critics"; "Bollywood, Hindutva Ideology and Extremism"; and "A Dangerous Country for Journalists and Activists".

Javeed also discusses the ambiguities in the Indian Constitution concerning the definition of secularism and refers to constitutional experts on the subject.

"After partition in 1947, Nehru and the Indian National Congress effectively managed to keep Hinduism forces sidelined and uphold their conceived model of secularism and inclusivism. Unfortunately, after Nehru died in 1964, the same Congress party, under the leadership of his daughter Indira Gandhi and then his grandson, Rajiv, pandered on religious lines for electoral gains, thus paving the way for Hindutva forces to take centre stage. After that, secular forces appeared to engage in pseudo-secularism rather than the genuine secularism Nehru had promoted through his envisioned secular model."

The author pronounces that these negative violent trends can be turned around by raising awareness about the truth, starting at an individual level. Every individual, from any background and in any position, can plant the seeds of collective wisdom for the prosperity of the society, country, region and the world. The transformation of societies can begin with individuals who uphold mutual respect and tolerance rather than enforcing their rules on others.

Likewise, the role of the international community is also crucial in preventing human rights abuses in India and any part of the world, especially in the name of caste and religion. "We must work together before racial and religious extremism annihilates targeted minorities and extends its influence beyond geographical boundaries."

Javeed adds, "In 2013, one of my daughters was eager to learn what defines good and bad for us human beings, irrespective of any religious belief that could appeal to common sense. I provided the following words to answer her questions: when any creature in this universe is adversely affected by our thought, a word or an act, it is termed 'bad'. Conversely, it is 'good' when the creation benefits from our thoughts, expressions, words or actions. In the larger picture, good and bad intentions influence the life of a person who harbours them and affect his surroundings correspondingly."

Unfortunately, despite its attention to details about the pogroms in India, there is hardly any information available about the author, the publisher, or the distributor in the book or online. ■

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A new book documents an untold story of courage and unwavering commitment during one of the most turbulent periods in the Subcontinent's history

Trains of resilience



Maal Gaari Mein Amanatain
By Advocate Hanif Bandhani
Qalam Foundation
ISBN: 978-9697463220
196pp.

Reviewed by Muhammad Suhayb

The Partition of the Subcontinent was not just a historical event — it was a deeply personal tragedy for millions. For those who lived through it, it often meant tearing themselves away from the soil they called home, leaving behind memories, loved ones and generations of belonging. It wasn't just a journey, it was heartbreak wrapped in uncertainty.

While many of us have heard the stories and are aware of the surface-level struggles of migrants, a new book, *Maal Gaari Mein Amanatain* [Keepsakes in a Cargo Train], delves deeper, honouring the silent sacrifices of those whose courage history often forgets. The railcar, once a symbol of travel and connection, becomes in this book a poignant metaphor for shattered lives and quiet bravery. It carried more than just people and luggage — it held hope, memory and trust. And if it weren't for the kindness and courage of many unnamed souls, the outcome of this painful exodus might have been far more tragic.

The 196-page book tells the story of Chaudhary Muhammad Ismail, a contract carrier entrusted with the enormous responsibility of relocating government property, confidential records, and other valuable "amanatain" via rail amid the chaos of Partition.

Despite securing the tender a month before Partition, life was not easy for Chaudhary Ismail. *Maal Gaari Mein Amanatain* is a vivid recollection of his son, Advocate Hanif Bandhani, that truly brings the past to life — transporting readers back 80 years to an era ruled by the Viceroy, when the Congress and Muslim League were fiercely battling to end British colonial rule and financial transactions relied on cheques, deposits and receipts.

The incident when Chaudhary Ismail — who had previously undertaken contracts for the British government — fell ill, speaks volumes. His brief two-day absence from duty was enough to prompt the Viceroy himself to visit his home and order immediate medical treatment. It wasn't just an act of concern; it reflected how deeply the British valued and relied on their trusted associates.

Returning to the book, though its primary focus is on the period from July 15 to September 30, 1947, the story truly begins on June 3, 1947, with Quid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah's historic address on the radio. What followed was chaos: families were uprooted, lives were lost, and a nation was thrust into upheaval. Amid this turmoil, Chaudhary Ismail was robbed of 20,000 rupees in cash — payment he had received for a transport tender — during the violent unrest of Partition.

Ismail's family, except for his mother who was tragically killed in the violence, was relocated to a temporary shelter in a hut — departing from their once-settled life in Multan Dhaanra, Pahar Ganj, Delhi. The journey they endured — from crowded camps to eventual resettlement in Lahore and later Sukkur — stands as a powerful testament to the immense sacrifices made in pursuit of the 'land of the pure.'

Despite the surrounding chaos, Ismail never wavered in his sense of duty. He assembled a team of 25 workers and sent them ahead to Karachi, with clear instructions to receive the goods he was transporting. In a time of minimal communication infrastructure, his ability to organise and execute such a complex operation was nothing short of extraordinary.

Long before professional moving services existed, contract carriers like Ismail were the lifeline of displaced families — transporting entire households for less than a rupee per man (40 pounds) — 11 annas to be exact. Their work was driven not by profit, but by responsibility, resilience and sheer will.

Set during one of the most turbulent periods in the Subcontinent's history, this is ultimately a story of courage and commitment. After the signing of the extraordinary Carriage Contract on August 14, 1947, between the railway authorities of Delhi and Karachi, Chaudhary Muhammad Ismail was entrusted with a mission of national importance. His former colleagues — Iskandar Mirza, then Assistant

Secretary of Defence (later President of Pakistan) and Chaudhry Muhammad Ali, then Assistant Secretary of Finance (later Prime Minister) — placed their trust in him to transport personal libraries, treasured heirlooms, and confidential government documents, safely across newly drawn borders.

The train's journey to Lahore reads like a thriller. Along the route, ambushes awaited on the Bhatinda-Amritsar railway tracks, as did heavy rains. But Ismail, who was in his 40s, never faltered in his duty.

Bureaucratic red tape delayed the payment and Ismail, who firmly believed in paying his workers on time, bore the brunt of it. His health declined under the weight of mounting pressure and, like many who dreamed of building a better future, he was ultimately left behind to suffer in silence. However, the book contains over 90 pages of documents that itself reveal how such stalwarts were treated.

At a time when many gave in to opportunism, Ismail's refusal to profit beyond his modest fee stands out as a rare example of ethical public service. Despite lending just 5,000 rupees to the then Assistant Secretary of Defence — on the promise it would be returned in Pakistan — Ismail declined the offer of government housing when the loan was eventually repaid by President Iskandar Mirza himself.

The train's journey to Lahore reads like a thriller. Along the route, ambushes awaited on the Bhatinda-Amritsar railway tracks, as did heavy rains. But Ismail, who was in his 40s, never faltered in his duty... Ever wondered how a settee from Lucknow or a cupboard from Bombay made it safely to a home in Karachi, even as bloodthirsty mobs roamed the streets during Partition? It was thanks to trusted individuals like Chaudhary Ismail — men of grit and unwavering integrity — who risked everything to ensure that what was entrusted to them arrived intact.

"Ever wondered how a settee from Lucknow or a cupboard from Bombay made it safely to a home in Karachi, even as bloodthirsty mobs roamed the streets during Partition? It was thanks to trusted individuals like Chaudhary Ismail — men of grit and unwavering integrity — who risked everything to ensure that what was entrusted to them arrived intact."

His story is not merely one of transport, but of trust, sacrifice and quiet resilience during one of the most turbulent chapters in the Subcontinent's history. When Hanif Bandhani's repeated efforts to archive the material were dismissed, he turned to others for help and Qalam Foundation came up with a book-on-memoir. Had the Ministry of National Affairs accepted the documentation rather than refusing them — the public might never have seen this powerful work, which now stands as a significant contribution to Partition literature, particularly for historians and archivists.

More than a son's tribute to his father, it is a moving reminder that nations are not shaped by politicians alone, but also by those who quietly uphold their commitments — often at tremendous personal cost. ■

The reviewer writes on old films and music and loves reading books. X: @suhaybalavi

CONTINUATIONS

THE PROCESS OF GRIEF, PAGE 06

Islam does not offer Suad all the answers. What it does provide is a sense of solace through an Islamic framework of rituals, which initiates a process of meaning-making. Suad finds peace in her daily prayers and in caring for her friend Najla, whose husband Bilal has been suddenly diagnosed with dementia. Her vibrant relationship with her husband Sherif also enables her to be grateful for the time they shared.

According to Deborah Carr, the grieving processes of older widows and widowers are shaped by various factors, including the nature of their marital relationship, the circumstances surrounding their spouse's death, the difficulties faced during their partner's final days, and the presence of other social roles and relationships that may either alleviate or intensify their sense of loss. The crippling situation of Bilal and his constant fights with Najla make Suad grateful that she "would always remember [Sherif] loving her and trusting her. Nothing had happened to soil this picture of him." This, in turn, helps Suad navigate this grief.

Grief, then, as Aboulela shows, is a process. Through faith, reflection and quiet acts of care, Suad reaches a point where grief no longer dominates her life. When she finally enters the bedroom she had abandoned after her husband's death, she finds that grief is no longer there. Instead, "the room looked beautiful. A room that was full of happy memories. Full of the warmth and love they had shared. Full of lively conversations and the times they prayed together. Tears flowed down her face, but she did not feel sad."

Later, when all three of her children surprise her on Eid by visiting her new apartment, the moment is filled with forgiveness and love. When they give her a gift — a picture of her and Sherif — she realises that grief may not have vanished, but it no longer dominates.

Across 16 mostly linear chapters, Aboulela's and portrayal of loss in *A New Year* is subtle, honest and unflinching. It refuses the comfort of false promises and instead situates grief as a universal, inevitable and at the same time, highly subjective and personal part of life. If we choose to confront grief rather than flee from it, we may learn to live with it — even if begrudgingly.

have changed. ■

The reviewer is assistant professor of English and African literature at Lums, Lahore. She can be reached at sadiya.zulfiqar@lums.edu.pk

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COLUMN



Ghalib and Momin — I

By Mehr Afshan Farooqi

Poets-writers do not function in a vacuum, they belong to a milieu, have a circle of friends and rivals and an audience of listeners and readers.

Momin Khan Momin was Ghalib's contemporary, a friend one might say, a peer whose poetry Ghalib admired. Unfortunately, Momin died accidentally at the age of 51 from a fall in 1851. Ghalib went on to live until 1869. I had wanted to write a book on Momin for some years. I finally began work on the project this summer. In spite of having a somewhat fleshed out proposal with ideas for chapters, I found myself stuck and going in circles.

Momin was born in Delhi in 1800/1 and died in 1851, well before the Revolt of 1857. He was barely three years old when the British East India Company's forces under Lord Lake defeated the army of the Marathas and marched into Delhi. The Mughal ruler had already been reduced to a pawn and pensioner, whose authority existed in name only. The British were astute not to disturb the status quo.

Negotiations were carried out with Shah Alam II, the Mughal ruler whose privilege to rule was signified by coins issued under his name and the *khutba* read in the mosque on Friday. All this remained unchanged. Shah Alam II was succeeded by his son, Akbar Shah II. A relative period of peace followed. Not many changes were introduced until 1830.

Momin belonged to a family of famous *hakeems* who had moved to Delhi from Kashmir. In 1761, during the rule of Shah Alam II, two brothers — Kamdar Khan and Namdar Khan — travelled from Kashmir to Delhi. They were employed at the court of Shah Alam II and awarded the *jagir* of Narnaul. Hakeem Namdar's son, Ghulam Nabi Khan, was Momin's father. When the Company took over the administration of Delhi, the *pargana* [district] of Narnaul was taken away. In lieu of that, a stipend of 1,000 rupees annually was awarded to the dependents. Momin's father received 45 rupees.

Hakeem Ghulam Nabi Khan was a *mureed* of Shah Abdul Aziz, son of the Sufi-reformer Shah Waliullah, who founded the Madrasah-i-Rahimiyah. Thus, when Nabi Khan's son was born in 1800, the venerated Shah Abdul Aziz was requested to suggest a name and recite the *aazaan* in the newborn's ear. Shah Abdul Aziz suggested Muhammad Momin Khan as the name for the child.

Momin went on to study at the Madrasah Rahimiyah, where he became proficient in Persian and Arabic. He learned the practice of *Unani* [Greek] medicine from his father and uncle and became a *hakeem*. Momin's affiliations with Shah Abdul Aziz did not end. He was a staunch Sunni and became a follower of Shah Ahmad Bareli.

Asadullah Khan Ghalib was born and grew up in Agra in the last decade of the 18th century. Ghalib's father was a soldier who was killed by a stray bullet while in the service of Raja Alwar while Ghalib was very young. His uncle (father's brother), Nasrullah Beg Khan, joined Lord Lake with his own forces and was rewarded with the revenue of the *parganas* of Sonk and Sonra. He was married to the daughter of the highly influential Nawab Ahmad Baksh Khan of Firozepur-Jhirka and Loharu.

Nasrullah Khan's accidental death in 1806 deprived Ghalib once again of paternal mentoring. The British took back the land and conferred a pension of 10,000 rupees to be shared among the dependents of Nasrullah Beg from Nawab Ahmad Baksh Khan's estate. The latter reduced the pension to 5,000, of which he gave half to another dependent, Ghalib and his brother's share came to Rs 1,500 per annum.

Ghalib moved to Delhi permanently after his marriage to Umra Begum, the daughter of Nawab Ilahi Baksh Ma'ruf. The latter was a younger brother of Nawab Ahmad Baksh Khan. Ma'ruf was a poet with leanings towards mysticism. Unfortunately for Ghalib, his father-in-law's unworldliness left him in the uncomfortable state of having in Nawab Ahmad Khan a powerful wealthy relative who deprived Ghalib of his rightful share of his uncle's pension. Ghalib's move to Delhi occurred sometime between 1813-15. It is said that he never owned a house in Delhi and always lived in rented places — the last was in Ballimaran, rented from Hakeem Mahmud.

Thus, though Ghalib and Momin were contemporaries who shared a literary milieu, yet we cannot assume that their lived experiences of Delhi were similar. How different was Momin's Delhi from Ghalib's Delhi? My aim is to examine Momin's Delhi through the network of his profession as a *hakeem* and also his affiliation with the *mujahideen* of Ahmad Bareli.

What was the status of *hakeems* in Delhi's society? To what extent did they represent the literate elite of society? What were the institutions of learning? What was the equation between the secular and the sacred?

My initial research shows that *hakeems* were among society's elite. The *Unani* system of medicine travelled first to southern India via trade relations with Arabs. Here, it was infused with the Ayurvedic practice of medicine. However, the influx of *hakeems* from Persia in notable numbers occurred during Mughal rule, along with poets and artists. *Hakeems* enjoyed the patronage of the royalty and the nobility, as did poets. But the nature of their profession brought them closer to the seat of power. Medical practice of the *Unani* style necessitated at least some knowledge of Arabic. Reform movements of the Wahabi style advocated a return to the scriptures and doctrinal texts in Arabic.

In Momin, I found a scholar of Arabic, Persian and Urdu with a strong leaning towards classical arts. He composed ghazals that featured direct engagement with emotions; he did not shy from expressing love in its physicality in his *masnavi*. Momin's persona was romantic — his flamboyant style of dress, long, curly hair falling on his shoulders, and singing in the company of *fazikhah* writers.

Ghalib, in spite of the fame he acquired in his lifetime, and more so afterwards, is more of a tragic figure. He suffered and injustices — the unfair allocation of pension, the death of his infant children, his brother Yusuf's madness and death, the humiliation of being jailed for gambling, most likely embittered him. ■

[To be continued]

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► EPICURIOUS



The story of *beh*, Sindh's beloved lotus root, and how to bring its taste to your kitchen...

ROOT OF THE MATTER

By Shazia Hasan

As the sun sets in Mohenjo Daro, Allah Dino — the guard at the gates of the excavation site — stops people from venturing inside while urging museum upstairs is already closed. Still, the people are hungry for more, brewing tea in a neat little stall there. Hakim Zadi and her husband Owais are more than happy to sell not just tea to the visitors who come here from all over the delicacy of Sindh. Hakim Zadi's *beh sabzi* is a popular choice. On the menu, she 'beh', it is also known as *kawali kakri* or lotus root.

Hakim Zadi cooks two lotus root options: plain with tomatoes and yogurt or with spinach. "I inherited my cooking skills from my mother and grandmother but that was not enough to feed my six children," the woman smiles. She was able to set up the stall at Mohenjo Daro after getting a loan from the Sindh Rural Support Organisation. Now, she also runs a catering business. "Of course, *beh* is always on the menu because it is Sindh's delicacy," she tells *EOS*.

A few tips from her about cooking *beh* and how to find the best lotus root in the market proved helpful when I went looking for it in Karachi, where it is not easily available. You can either find it in Empress Market, Garden East or around Numaish, provided you know what you are looking for.

Looking for something white, similar to horseradish, resembling an old telephone dial, because of the many holes, I did not recognise *beh* when I actually saw it in Empress Market. It was completely covered in mud. "You must make sure that both sides are intact and sealed otherwise the dirt enters the holes, making it difficult to wash off," Hakim Zadi had warned. But here, the ends were not even visible. They were completely covered in hardened mud.

Soaking the *beh* in water for a while helps get rid of the mud but cleaning also involves scraping the skin. Thankfully, both ends were sealed. After cleaning and slicing each root, you must soak it in water mixed with white vinegar before cooking because it tends to change colour, similar to a peeled potato or apple. Following are some options of how you can cook *beh*.

BEH CHIPS

A couple of medium-sized lotus roots may be cleaned and sliced thinly before being soaked in water with a couple of tablespoons of white vinegar for about one hour. After drying the slices, deep fry them until they turn golden brown. Sprinkle salt to taste, with black pepper and garlic powder before relishing the crunchy delight.

BEH CURRY

Clean thoroughly and cut one kilogramme of *beh* into thick slices. Pour a little oil into a cooking pot to fry half a cup of chopped onions, with half teaspoon each of salt and turmeric powder. Add 10 cups of water and let it cook on low heat until tender.

Prepare the curry in a separate pot by frying another half cup of chopped onions until they turn golden. Add two chopped tomatoes, with a teaspoon each of red chilli powder and coriander powder, another half teaspoon of turmeric powder and a quarter teaspoon of *garam masala* [mix of ground spices] powder with salt to taste. Also, add one teaspoon each of ginger and garlic paste. Stir for two minutes before adding two chopped tomatoes. Stir until the tomatoes are tender. Add a couple of green chillies for flavour and aroma before adding the spinach.

Stir for around five minutes before adding the boiled *beh* and stirring further. Cover with a lid for 10 minutes and leave on low heat until you notice oil seeping out from the sides.



Beh being sold at Empress Market | Photos by the writer

BEH IN SPINACH

Boil one kg of *beh* cut into thick slices in a separate pot with 10 cups of water, mixed with one teaspoon of turmeric powder until the *beh* is tender. Also, clean and slice the spinach leaves before placing them in another pot over heat, without adding water as the water in the spinach itself will help it cook. Set aside while the spinach water evaporates.

Now, pour in one cup of cooking oil into a fresh pot and fry before adding a quarter teaspoon *garam masala*, half a teaspoon of white cumin seeds, and one teaspoon each of red chilli powder, turmeric powder and coriander powder with salt according to taste. Then, add one teaspoon each of ginger and garlic paste. Stir for two minutes before adding two chopped tomatoes. Stir until the tomatoes are tender. Add a couple of green chillies for flavour and aroma before adding the spinach.

Stir for around five minutes before adding the boiled *beh* and stirring further. Cover with a lid for 10 minutes and leave on low heat until you notice oil seeping out from the sides.

This piece would not be complete without Hakim Zadi stressing the benefits of *beh*. "It has a number of health benefits," she had told me. "The fibre found in it is good for the heart. It helps in diabetes, too. Besides, it is the ideal vegetable to have in the hot summer as it carries properties that normalise body heat."

And where did she hear all that? "From my mother and grandmother. Any doctor will back this claim."



Beh curry

The writer is a member of staff. X: @HasanShazia

GARDENING



From removing weeds to boosting fertility, tilling is the unsung hero of gardening...

TILL FOR LIFE

By Dr Khwaja Ali Shahid

Wether it's early morning ploughing by farmers using tractors, in the field or simple tilling of nursery soil in a pot at home with a small portable spade, the idea is the same — to soften the soil, soil surface and ground. Sometimes, a nascent, germinating seed and a feeble seedling need support from its external environment in the initial few days of the plant life cycle. Softening up the potting mix can go a long way in this regard.

One of the most common mistakes among new gardening enthusiasts is not softening up the soil enough. The tilling of the entire pot, or the container in which the seeds have been sown or seedlings have been transferred to, is essential for the plant's better growth. If the pot and the soil within are already being reused after a season or so, the tilling becomes even more important.

In soil that has been softened up, individual seeds and seedlings can be manually placed with the help of a portable trowel or a small spade. Some gardeners also use a small shovel, spoon or even a butter-knife; smaller utensils would rather fulfill the requirement in smaller pots than full-size gardening tools. A few deep strokes at that moment are considered enough to eventually place one seed within.

However, in neglected stretches of land, flower beds or soil-filled pots, which have not been in use for cultivation for months or years, tilling needs to be done in a dedicated manner. After tilling, some gardeners prefer to leave the growing space as it is and conduct another round of tilling again after a couple of days. Others, however, adhere to watering it, while repeating the tilling again to ensure maximum water absorption by the soil.

In relatively better soil conditions, nursery fertiliser or fine compost can also be added to the soil to further boost fertility and soil quality. This boosting can be performed after watering or, in the case of not watering, during the



Attached to tractors and bull carts, different gadgets are used to plough crop fields | Photos by the writer



A small shovel can be used for tilling the soil in a pot or household garden

second tillage phase. Many gardeners firmly believe that compost or fertiliser added to dried pots and containers before watering is likely to get washed away without fulfilling its purpose.

With the passage of time, soil or pots that have neither been watered nor tilled would start to give an impression of a drought-stricken piece of land. The soil

starts to compact so much that even water would not easily absorb and mix with the soil. Apart from introducing air pockets within, tilled ground readily accepts watering and transfers water and other required nutrients to the roots for absorption, from where it reaches the rest of the plant above.

Please send your queries and emails to docfree101@hotmail.com. The writer is a physician and a host for the YouTube channel 'DocFree Gardening' promoting organic kitchen gardening

careful tilling in already potted plants or a thriving garden-bed further helps to mix the compost layer, organic manure and fertiliser on the surface to reach for within and be easily available to the roots. The loosened-up soil provides a healthy, happy ground for the nascent seedling to grow and turn into a robust fruiting plant in no time.

For seasoned gardeners who till the soil and loosen it up, it is easier to ascertain the composition and quantity of compost or fertiliser that is required by the plant. This boosting and preparing using fertilisers improves plant growth.

Careful tilling in already potted plants or a thriving garden-bed further helps to mix the compost layer, organic manure and fertiliser on the surface to reach for within and be easily available to the roots. The loosened-up soil provides a healthy, happy ground for the nascent seedling to grow and turn into a robust fruiting plant in no time.

EOS

ADVICE



AUNTIE AGNI

'How Do I Tell My Cousin About Her Hygiene Issues?'

[Note to readers: Don't read this letter while eating. Auntie made the mistake of going through this while having her breakfast and is still recovering.]

Dear Auntie,

I am in a very agitated position. My older cousin has come to live with us due to her college being in our city. I have no problem with her, or at least that was the case. But now, I am at my wits' end, especially since we share a room and bathroom.

My problems lie with her hygiene habits. Over time, I have tried to bring this up and appeal to her to fix the mess that she makes. She does clean it up when it is pointed out, but then it happens again and I have to again ask her to do her due diligence. I would rather just not see the sink strainer full of hair every other week or mucus left in the sink.

That is not even scratching the surface of what her hygiene issues are. I am fed up of her gross habits, which have shown no improvement over the past few months. My parents know about this but don't interfere, saying I should just tell her. But it is a short-term solution and I dislike telling/requesting, with a polite 'please', to keep the space clean, especially since she is older.

Regards,
The Odd Cousin

Dear Odd Cousin,
You've done the right thing by telling her directly. Unfortunately, you're dealing with an ingrained habit and, since your cousin is not changing her ways and your parents are also not stepping in, you'll need to change how things work in your room rather than keep repeating the same conversation.

Start by setting clear boundaries in writing, such as putting up some rules on a piece of paper and sticking it somewhere in the room and/or behind the bathroom door.

This should work better than repeated requests because it makes things official. Written rules are also not 'targeting' her and will apply to everyone in your space. You can title it "House Rules" and write a few rules down in clear language.

You should also make a weekly schedule of cleaning responsibilities. If it's her week to clean up, she's responsible. If she doesn't do it, avoid the temptation to clean up for her and request her to do it.

Draw a clear line in the areas in your room that are shared. Give her one shelf and keep one for you. Separate your towels and toiletries.

Also, you don't always have to sugarcoat your requests. Do a straightforward "Please clean the sink, it's dirty" without being rude and it should work.

Finally, please remember that you can't completely rewrite another person's habits, unless they themselves want to change. Know that, follow the above and hopefully you'll figure out a way to coexist with her without going crazy. ■

Disclaimer: If you or someone you know is in crisis and/or feeling suicidal, please go to your nearest emergency room and seek medical help immediately. Auntie will not reply privately to any query.

Please send concise queries to:
auntieagni@gmail.com

STATIC CLING



IT WAS ACTUALLY QUITE APT THAT AFTER THE INDIAN AIR CHIEF'S BELATED CLAIM, AFTER THREE MONTHS, THAT HIS AIR FORCE HAD SHOT DOWN SIX PAKISTANI AIRCRAFT — ALL WITHOUT ANY EVIDENCE — THAT THE INDIAN MILITARY SERVICES' SPOKESPERSONS WERE PARADED ON AMITABH BACHCHAN'S KAUN BANEGA CROREPATI. FOR THE MODI GOVERNMENT, WAR WAS ALWAYS A BOLLYWOOD GAME SHOW FOR MASS ENTERTAINMENT.



Dawn Opinion important key points

Date: 16 August 2025, Group Fee: 250/-

For Daily Dawn Newspaper Group: 03229117651

By Numan khan

Opinion No:01

Pakistan's Elite Capture Crisis (important For Current Affairs Paper)

1. Pakistan's Underdevelopment is Due to Systemic Failure, Not Lack of Resources

- **Hirschman's Argument:** Underdevelopment stems from a society's inability to organize itself for development, not from a lack of capital or skilled labor.
- **Pakistan's Reality:** Despite decades of potential (CENTO, SEATO, CPEC, SIFC), Pakistan's development indicators rival Afghanistan and sub-Saharan Africa due to systemic failures.

2. Pakistan is Organized for Elite Extraction, Not Development

- **Elite Capture:** The country's laws, institutions, and policies are structured to benefit a small elite rather than promote broad-based development.
- **Mutually Exclusive Models:** Elite extraction and inclusive development cannot coexist—Pakistan has chosen the former.

3. Characteristics of Development-Oriented Societies (Missing in Pakistan)

- Human capital development
- High savings and investment rates
- Equitable tax regimes
- Transparent governance
- Institutional checks and balances
- Policy resistance to regulatory capture

4. Pakistan's Dysfunctional State Structure

- **Constitution without Constraints:** Fails to provide checks on power.



Daily One Guess Essay For CSS Exam 2026

Date: 16 August 2025, Group Fee: 250/-

For Daily Dawn Newspaper Group: 03229117651

By Numan Khan

Essay Title:

A Storm Tests the Tree, but Roots Grow Deepest in the Wind

Topic Statement:

Adversity strengthens resilience, shaping individuals, societies, and nations into enduring entities.

Outline

1. Introduction: Meaning of the idiom and relevance to human struggle
2. Adversity as a natural test of resilience
3. Historical examples of nations strengthened through crises
4. Individual growth through personal struggles and setbacks
5. Psychological resilience and the science of post-traumatic growth
6. Role of adversity in shaping collective identity and unity
7. Cultural and literary reflections on strength in hardship
8. The economic dimension: Crises as catalysts for reform
9. Political storms and the deepening of democratic roots
10. Global challenges: Climate change, pandemics, and shared human resilience
11. The balance between vulnerability and growth
12. Lessons for Pakistan: Testing storms and future resilience
13. Conclusion: From survival to flourishing through storms



Summary of Dawn Editorials and Opinions

Date:16 August 2025, Group Fee:250/-

For Daily Dawn Newspaper Group:03229117651

By Numan khan

Summary of Thin ice

The editorial reflects on Independence Day celebrations, highlighting Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's call for unity through a new agreement, the Misaq-i-Istehkam-i-Pakistan, which he presented as a compact for national stability. He urged political parties to rise above personal interests, set aside empty slogans, and embrace collective thinking for the greater good of Pakistan. However, his speech lost much of its spirit of reconciliation when he followed it with harsh criticism of those he termed "fitnas" who allegedly incite riots, vandalism, and rebellion against the state. This weakened the message of magnanimity he initially attempted to convey. In contrast, National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq provided a more genuine example of reconciliation by inviting the opposition for dialogue, offering government representatives for talks, and stressing that negotiation was the only way forward to reduce divisions and resolve political disputes.

At the same time, the PTI shifted its stance on Independence Day. Instead of using the occasion for protest, the party's chairman, Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, announced that PTI would celebrate the day, signaling a softer and more reconciliatory approach. This move suggested external pressures and a growing demand for political compromise. The editorial concludes by reminding Pakistan's political class that they are skating on thin ice: civilian leaders often find themselves quickly sidelined once they lose relevance. Therefore, it is in their best interest to stand united, build mutual understanding, and avoid deepening divisions that weaken the political system.

Summary of Silent threat

Pakistan is facing a growing health crisis as diabetes, particularly type 2, has reached alarming levels, with millions suffering from its complications such as heart attacks, strokes, kidney failure, blindness, disability, and diabetic foot that often leads to amputations. The International Diabetes Federation has identified Pakistani adults as having the highest diabetes rates in the world, making this a national emergency. While the opening of a multidisciplinary facility at Karachi's Baqai Institute of Diabetology and Endocrinology shows how integrated care can manage the disease and its complications, such centres remain scarce, leaving many patients without even basic screening. Experts stress that although diabetes is relentless, it can be prevented through lifestyle changes, including healthy eating, regular exercise, and early detection of symptoms. Prevention should extend beyond households into schools, workplaces, and public spaces by promoting



Daily Dawn Idioms

Date:15 August 2025, Group Fee:250/.

For Daily Dawn Newspaper Group:03229117651

By Numan khan

Idioms

Jewel in the crown

- **English meaning:** The most valuable or admired part of something.
- **Urdu meaning:** سب سے قیمتی یا فخر کا حصہ
- **Example:** Gwadar was supposed to be the jewel in the CPEC crown.

Out of the woods

- **English meaning:** Out of danger or difficulty, especially after a period of trouble.
- **Urdu meaning:** خطرے یا مشکل سے باہر آ جانا
- **Example:** The economy may have stabilised but it is not yet out of the woods.

Too little, too late

- **English meaning:** An effort made too late to be effective.
- **Urdu meaning:** دیر سے اور ناقابلی کو شش
- **Example:** Perhaps sensing the situation — albeit a bit late in the day — the prime minister has formed a committee...

All talk, little on the ground (*variation of “all talk and no action”*)

- **English meaning:** Making promises without real action or results.
- **Urdu meaning:** صرف باتیں کرنا مگر عمل نہ کرنا
- **Example:** This is, in fact, reflective of the overall official approach towards Balochistan: tall promises, but little on the ground.

Vote of confidence

- **English meaning:** An expression of support or approval.